

Cabinet 16 October 2024	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Steve Reddy, Corporate Director of Children's Services	Classification: Unrestricted
Special Educational Needs, Disabilities and Inclusion Strategy: 2024-2029	

Lead Member	Councillor Maium Talukdar, Statutory Deputy Mayor, Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning
Originating Officer(s)	Lisa Fraser, Director of Education
Wards affected	All
Key Decision?	No
Reason for Key Decision	This report has been reviewed as not meeting the Key Decision criteria.
Forward Plan Notice Published	4 June 2024
Exempt information	None.
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	Priority 3: Accelerate Education Priority 5: Investing in Public Services

Executive Summary

This partnership strategy sets out the shared outcomes that leaders will work collectively to achieve for all children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in Tower Hamlets. The Special Educational Needs, Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2024 – 2029 is a partnership strategy developed on behalf of the Tower Hamlets SEND Improvement Board: a partnership between the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, schools representatives, Barts Health NHS Trust, North East London Integrated Care Board, East London NHS Foundation Trust, the SEND Parents forum, and the Our Time Young People's Forum.

The strategy sets out how leaders will work collectively so we deliver the right support at the right time for children and young people with SEND and their families in Tower Hamlets.

The strategy was approved at Health and Wellbeing Board on 17 September 2024. Cabinet is asked to note and endorse the strategy priorities.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the partnership Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy.
2. To note the Equalities Impact Assessment as set out in Paragraph 4.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The current SEND Strategy (2020 – 2024) is set to expire shortly. A new strategy has been developed to ensure a clear vision and priorities for the partnership, aiming to deliver sustained improvements in support for children and young people with SEND and their families.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The current SEND Strategy (2020 – 2024) could be allowed to lapse. However, as part of the SEND area inspection anticipated in 2024, the partnership is expected to demonstrate shared outcomes that leaders will collectively work to achieve for all children and young people with SEND, as well as how partners will collaborate to attain these outcomes. An agreed-upon strategy is a crucial element in this process.
- 2.2 While the option of extending the current SEND Strategy (2020 – 2024) with a very light-touch refresh exists, it was initially considered at the beginning of the strategy development process and subsequently rejected. The prior strategy was formulated before several key developments: the Covid pandemic, the 2021 SEND Area Inspection, rapid increases in the number of children and young people with SEND, and the launch of the national government's SEND and Alternative Provision reform programme. Consequently, the decision was made that a new strategy is necessary.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The partnership's new Special Educational Needs, Disabilities and Inclusion Strategy describes the steps we will take as a partnership to realise our vision of Tower Hamlets as a child-friendly borough, where children and young people of all abilities and from all backgrounds thrive, are listened to, achieve their best, and have opportunities. The strategy – to be delivered by the SEND Improvement Board – sets out six priorities that we believe will provide the appropriate support at the right time for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, as well as their families.
- 3.2 The strategy is a live document. Each year, we will agree a partnership-wide programme delivery plan. This will allow the partnership to focus on specific areas to ensure concrete progress can be made. Over the next five years, we

are likely to see shifts in the national policy environment, local evolution of the needs of children and young people with SEND, as well as the outcome of external inspections and reviews. The delivery plan will reflect this changing context.

Policy context

- 3.3 The duties of local authorities, health bodies, schools, and colleagues to provide for children and young people with special educational needs are set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 and described in greater detail in the 2015 Statutory Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years.
- 3.4 The Government's SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper was published in 2022 and echoed the widely held view that the 2014 reforms failed to achieve the goal of improving provision for children with SEND. In March 2023, the Government set out an improvement plan addressing national standards, preparation for adulthood, accountability, and financial sustainability. A clear timeframe for legislation has not been established yet. The incoming Labour government has pledged to improve inclusivity in mainstream schools and ensure schools co-operate with councils on SEND inclusion, but has not committed to implementing the Green paper reforms and has made no commitments on alternative provision.
- 3.5 This strategy sets out how the partnership will work at pace to deliver our statutory responsibilities. At the same time, we set out the ways that we will work together and with families to build confidence in the SEND system, to provide earlier support, to improve the sustainability of the SEND system, and to ensure wider opportunities in our borough are inclusive for children and young people with SEND.

Local context: children and young people with SEND in Tower Hamlets

- 3.6 In common with other areas, Tower Hamlets has seen an increase in children and young people with SEND needs since the Children and Families Act 2014.

There have been substantial increases in the number of children and young people with SEND needs receiving support.

- Between 2015/16 and 2023/24, the total number of children and young people aged 0 to 24 years resident in Tower Hamlets with EHC plans increased from 2066 to 4463. Some of this increase resulted from 20-25 year olds becoming eligible for EHC plans for the first time through the 2014 reforms. However, there were steady increases across all age groups with the exception of pre-school children. (Source: [Statements of special educational needs \(SEN\) and education, health and care \(EHC\) plans, gov.uk](#))
- Between 2015/16 and 2023/24, pupils in state-funded schools in Tower Hamlets, pupils with an EHC plan increased from 1850 to 3251 (from 4% to

6.8% of all pupils) and pupils with SEN support roughly stable – changing from 5870 to 5778 (12.6% to 12.4% of all pupils). (Source: [Special educational needs in England](#))

In the two years since the Covid pandemic, there has been a particularly steep growth in new requests for EHCP assessments. In the academic year 2023, there were 892 initial requests for an EHC plan, compared to 387 in 2021. Much of the increase has been for assessments for young children, for Autistic Spectrum Disorder, and for Speech and Language assessments, with assessment referrals for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder also growing.

- 3.7 The most common primary SEND needs amongst pupils in Tower Hamlets schools receiving SEN support are speech, language and communication needs and social, emotional and mental health needs. Amongst children with EHC plans in Tower Hamlets schools, Autistic Spectrum Disorder is the most common primary need, followed by Speech Language and Communications needs. Many children with SEND have multiple needs which are not reflected in the 'primary needs' data.
- 3.8 Projections developed as part of the borough's SEND Sufficiency Review (2023) point to a likely growth in the number of EHCPs up until 2030. The three main areas of need are likely to be Speech Language and Communication; Autism; and Social, Emotional and Mental Health. This increase in need, combined with a declining school-age population will mean that children with SEND will make up a growing proportion of the school-aged cohort.

Local context: the partnership's support for children and young people with SEND

- 3.9 Improving the timeliness and quality of the support that children and young people with SEND and their families receive is a priority for the partnership. The previous SEND Strategy (2020–24) had 5 priorities:
- Leading SEND
 - Early identification and assessment.
 - Commissioning effective services to respond to local needs
 - Good quality education provision for all children
 - Supporting successful transitions and promoting independence.
- 3.10 There are many strengths in education support for children and young people with SEND in Tower Hamlets. 96.7% of pupils attend schools rated Good or Outstanding, with 3 out of 5 Special Schools rated outstanding. Attainment for children with EHCPs or SEN support exceed the national average at Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and GCSE levels. Rates of absence, exclusions, and suspensions for children with SEND are also better than average. More than 9 in 10 children with SEND are educated in mainstream schools, and a lower percentage of them are in long term alternative provision in Tower Hamlets than nationally. Our recent SEND sufficiency review (2023) has identified priorities for expansion of specialist provision – now and in the future – to meet the educational needs of children with SEND in the borough.

- 3.11 In 2021, a SEND Local Area Inspection by Ofsted and the CQC found that leaders had a good understanding of what worked well and what does not. It noted improvements in SEND provision but identified significant weaknesses. These are the focus of the current SEND Improvement Plan, underpinned by a Written Statement of Action to address the quality and oversight of EHC plans and annual reviews; lengthy waiting times for ASD assessment and diagnosis; fragmented speech and language therapy; and weaknesses in communication between area leaders and parents. Progress has been supported with additional investment: an extra £1.1 million in council funding and £870,000 from the NHS. Further resources have been earmarked in the council's new Medium Term Financial Strategy for SEND Services, SEN Transport, and the Mayor has additionally agreed to 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.
- 3.12 In 2023, a Local Government Association SEND Peer Challenge assisted the partnership to take stock of progress. The challenge recognised the commitment across the partnership to drive better outcomes for children and young people with SEND. It highlighted the need to continue to improve the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care Plans and Annual Reviews, improve information sharing, and to develop a common and widely understood graduated response for children with different needs across the partnership, supported by a clear, concise strategy and strong governance through the SEND Improvement Board.
- 3.13 Alongside our commitment to improvement, the partnership has been exploring how to sustain high quality SEND support whilst the High Needs Block allocation (funding to support costs of pupils with additional education needs, across mainstream and special schools as well as the associated support costs) fails to keep up with growing levels of need. Through its participation in the Delivering Better Value Programme, Tower Hamlets will provide an improvement programme designed to meet children's needs earlier, bringing together multi-disciplinary teams to support children with SEND in mainstream education settings, and to rationalise financial top-up bandings and what support children should expect to receive at each level. The implementation of the SEND Sufficiency Review recommendations will also contribute to financial sustainability, by increasing the number of children who have their educational needs met in local state-funded schools, reducing the number of higher cost independent and out-of-borough placements.

SEND and Inclusion Strategy development process.

- 3.14 The starting point for the strategy is the Tower Hamlets Partnership Plan 'A Tower Hamlets for All', supported by the Accelerate! Children and Families Partnership Strategy (2024-2029) They include the partnership's ambition that Tower Hamlets should become:

A child-friendly borough where children and young people from all backgrounds thrive, are listened to, achieve their best, and have opportunities.

- 3.15 Young people, families and partners have requested a concise SEND strategy which clearly sets out the main things the partnership will do to support children and young people with SEND and their families. Although the strategy document itself is short, it is underpinned by engagement with stakeholders and residents, and survey and analytical work conducted for the SEND Sufficiency Review and Delivering Better Value Programme.
- 3.16 The strategy was initially developed in through consultation process with young people, families, and professionals, including:
- discussions with leaders from different partners at the SEND Improvement Board in November 2023 and February 2024
 - an in-person discussion with the Our Time all ability youth forum to find out about the issues that matter most to young people with SEND (November 2023)
 - online surveys with partner representatives and Special Educational Needs Coordinators in schools (November to December 2023)
 - an online workshop to map initial challenges and issues (November 2023)
 - an in-person workshop attended by 50 people to which partners, parents and young people, schools, health and voluntary and community sector professionals were invited, with a focus on developing practical strategy actions (January 2024)
 - analysis of recent consultation and engagement conducted as part of the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme – including survey responses from more than 100 parents and carers (2023 – 24)
 - Feedback from families attending Let's Talk SEND events.
- 3.17 Annex 2 provides a detailed overview of the consultation process and issues arising. The strategy (including easy read versions) was available on the Let's Talk platform for comment for six weeks between May and June 2024, and a survey was extensively publicised through social media, information channels for parents and carers of children with SEND, and community and faith networks. There were 42 survey responses, and discussions and engagement events were held with around 190 people present. Attention was given to ensuring that a diverse range of residents were able to take part, including parents and carers from British Bangladeshi and Somali backgrounds.
- 3.18 As a result of feedback, the strategy has been significantly strengthened in a number of ways to provide more clarity on :
- How the strategy will be delivered and the role of the SEND partnership, including clearer linkages with the early help partnership
 - Shared outcomes for children and young people with SEND
 - Specific commitments relating to alternative provision and to children and young people with SEND who are known to children's social care, youth justice and probation
 - Performance measures: we have used measures where there is existing, reliable data – typically data in the public domain. Where possible we have added additional measures. This will be

complemented by the development of an annual survey of children and young people, and by operational monitoring of strategy delivery.

3.19 The strategy has six priorities:

- Priority 1 - Timely, effective, and well-coordinated support for children and young people with SEND - focuses on delivering continued improvements in the support provided for children and young people with SEND and their families in a context of increasing need for support.
- Priority 2 - User-friendly services for children and young people with SEND and their families - reflects feedback from families and professionals that services are hard to navigate, and not sufficiently designed with children and families' needs in mind.
- Priority 3 - Early identification and support for the under-fives - is part of our broader commitment to early identification and support. Providing early evidence-based support without delay can support children's development, avoid problems escalating and in some cases will mean that statutory assessment and plans are not required.
- Priority 4 - A great education and support for every school-age child with SEND – includes wide-ranging commitments to ensure that more children's needs can be met within mainstream schools, whilst expanding supply of local specialist placements within the state-funded sector for children who need them.
- Priority 5 - Opportunities and support for young adults with SEND – includes the development of more education, training, and employment opportunities for young adults.
- Priority 6 - A borough that welcomes and celebrates children and young people with SEND and supports them to thrive – responds to calls from children and young people with SEND to make Tower Hamlets a genuinely accessible and inclusive borough, with opportunities for friendship, enjoyment, and activity for young people of all abilities.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment is attached as Annex 3, and builds on the draft EqlA presented with the draft strategy. It finds that successful implementation will help to reduce inequalities (particularly those based on disability) and improve cohesion and inclusion.
- 4.2 The EqlA identifies possible barriers to identification of SEND and access to services for girls and minoritised communities. These will be explored in greater depth in the upcoming JSNA and will be addressed through the strategy's comprehensive approach to improve identification and assessment, access to services and information about services for children and young people with SEND and their families.
- 4.3 The EqlA makes three main recommendations which have been reflected in the strategy document:
- Complete a SEND JSNA and agree and implement recommendations
 - Ensure coproduction activities are representatives of different members of the community

- Improve minoritised communities' access to services: including implementing the agreed recommendations from the ASD in Somali children project, and reflecting detailed issues raised in the strategy consultation in the delivery plans.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

5.2 There are no further statutory implications to highlight in this section that are not covered within the main body of the report.

5.3 The main body of this report has identified the following statutory implications:

- A SEND local area inspection is expected, in which the partnership must demonstrate shared outcomes to work towards for all children and young people with SEND,
- Compliance with the duties outlined in the Children and Families Act 2014 and 2015 Statutory special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

6.1 The financial context for the SEND strategy is determined by funding provided by the government through the High Needs Block within the Dedicated School Grant (DSG). This is a ring-fenced grant provided by the DfE to fund all education provision. This report is a noting report and does not seek any approvals. If the strategy is to realise its aims, there may be financial implications. However, these must be managed within available resources and will be subject to consultation with Schools Forum.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

7.1 Section 27 of the Children and Families Act 2014 requires local authorities to keep under review the educational provision, training provision and social care provision made for children and young people for whom the local authority is responsible who have special educational needs or a disability.

- 7.2 Section 30 of the Children and Families Act 2014 requires local authorities to publish information about the local offer for children and young people in their area who have special educational needs or a disability.
- 7.3 Statutory guidance, SEND and disability code of practice 0-25 (2015) sets out the requirements on local authorities relating to children and young people with a disability.
- 7.4 The matters set out in this report demonstrate the Council's compliance with the above requirements.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- SEND Sufficiency Review 2023, included as part of [Planning for School Places 2024/25 Review and Recommendations](#)

Appendices

- Appendix A: SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024 – 29
- Appendix B: Consultation Report
- Appendix C: SEND and Inclusion Strategy: Equality Impact Assessment

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

- NONE

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