

Children & Families Committee

11 December 2023

Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund Policy (SENIF) with Consultation

Report of: Danielle Holdcroft, Head of Service Early Years, Family Help & Prevention

Report Reference No: CF/34/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 To request approval to implement the revised mechanism of support provided to enable children with special educational needs (SEN) to access their early education entitlements.
- 2 This is supporting the council's Corporate Plan objectives as follows:

An open and enabling organisation	Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making.
A council which empowers and cares about people	Support all children to have the best start in life. Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential.

Executive Summary

- 3 This report sets out the statutory duty to support children aged 3 and 4 with SEN to access their early education entitlements.
- 4 Support is currently provided for 2, 3 and 4 years olds with SEN via a grant to childcare providers to assist them to make adjustments to their provision. The grant is by application and is linked to the number of hours the child attends the provision and the level of support required.
- 5 This report sets out the limitations of the current process and proposed revisions to refocus SEND support on high quality provision using the graduated approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children & Families Committee is recommended to:

1. To consider the outcome from the consultation process and approve implementation of the policy set out in appendix 1 for new applications from January 2024, and all funding via the new policy from September 2024.

Background

- 6 SEN Inclusion Funding currently provides support for children through the graduated approach from SEN Support (based on the number of hours early education entitlement) up to receipt of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) for children who meet these criteria. This includes 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds.
- 7 The Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2-year-olds is top sliced by 1.9% to create a budget to enable 2 year olds with additional needs to be supported in the settings, following approval of the overall DSG budget at Children and Families Committee on 13 February 2023. The same percentage top slice will continue to be required in 2024-25.
- 8 An allocation is made from High Needs DSG to create the SEN Inclusion Fund for 3- and 4-year-olds and a budget for early years EHCPs of £1,106,545 was agreed in 2023-24 will continue to be required in 2024-25.

- 9 A Settling in Grant is available to support the transition of children with complex / specialist needs into childcare.
- 10 Specialist equipment may be requested, based on a health professionals' recommendation to enable a child to access their early education. This is paid from the Early Years supplies and services budget. Actual spend last financial year 2022-23 was £37,686.
- 11 Under the current procedures, grants are based on a funding formula of £9 per hour. This is less than the National Living Wage and does not take account of employers on costs. Payment in hours is not a statutory requirement and takes the focus off provision and directs it towards one-to-one support which is not relevant for the majority of children at a SEND support level.
- 12 Financial support is provided for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) as set out in the plan.
- 13 Current SEN Inclusion funding arrangements are being reviewed and alternative options considered due to:
 - (a) A growing number of children with additional needs attending settings in Cheshire East, some of which have severe complex/specialist needs who may start to access provision as early as 6 months of age. Increasing numbers of families are experiencing settings reporting that they cannot meet their child's needs.
 - (b) Insufficient budget - SEN Funding is paid via the SEN Inclusion Fund. This fund is to support 'low and emerging needs' and is paid linked to the child's access to their Free Early Educational Entitlement. However, in Cheshire East this budget supports all children with SEND in early years, including those who are accessing an Education, Health and Care plan. This has been in place since April 2017. This is reflected in budgets from 2023/24.
 - (c) Childcare providers are raising concerns that the current levels of funding are not sufficient to cover the cost of additional staffing hours and are often focused on additional hours rather than the quality of provision.
 - (d) The inclusion funding supports children to access their early education entitlement, including the 30 hours entitlement, but children may be in settings for more than their early education entitlement hours each week.

- (e) A small number of parents defer their child's entry to school. This creates an increased pressure on the budget as the children are funded for longer.
 - (f) The Early Years Supplies and Services budget, in addition to part funding the shortfall in the SEN Inclusion Fund, also provides specialist equipment to enable a child to attend their childcare provision. In the attached draft SENIF policy specialist equipment is factored into the bands and will be paid from the SENIF fund and not out of base budget.
- 14 The recommended model is set out in appendix 1. The revised methodology focuses on an incremental approach to support, concentrating on flexible provision to support children's needs, such as training to upskill practitioners, additional equipment, and resources or for children with the most complex needs additional staff support at times they may require it to effectively meet their needs. The revised draft policy moves us away from a set hours formula to a banding system which will fund additional provision above and beyond what a setting is expected to have "ordinarily available" to all children. The banding system is an "up to" amount that can be applied for termly so will only cover the cost or contribute towards the cost of what is required.
- 15 As an example, a child may be assessed as meeting the Tier 4 banding, an occupation therapist recommends that they need a specialist walking frame to access provision in the setting, no other equipment or support is required, and the walking frame costs £2,500. We would pay the £2,500. If the equipment was £6,000 we would contribute the maximum banding amount of £5,500. Paying an "up to" amount per band will enable us to distribute the SENIF fund in a much more precise and equitable way to meet children's individual needs.
- 16 Assessment of the bands will be based on the settings application as before; the applications will be assessed on a monthly schedule by the early years quality and inclusion coordinators in consultations with officers. A recommendations report is prepared for final approval by the Head of Service for Early years. Where an organisation makes an appeal that cannot be addressed by the early year's coordinator. The appeal will escalate to the early years forum for a decision who may request additional supporting information.
- 17 Crucially, the Special Education Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) is targeted support for childcare providers to meet individual needs. Support is not provided directly to the child / family.

- 18 The proposed SENIF policy would not include children with EHCPs. A Separate budget would be created to fund EHCPs. The proposed SENIF policy focuses on 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds with emerging needs, pre EHCP.
- 19 Consultation was targeted at Ofsted registered childcare providers delivering the early education entitlements and parents via the Parent Carer Forum. The draft report set out in appendix 1 was provided and responses collected and analysed – see appendix 2.

Consultation and Engagement

- 20 Pre-consultation with a multi-agency team of professionals and parent carer former representatives who are part of the early years SEND reforms task & finish group and the Early Years Reference Group, a subgroup of Schools Forum.
- 21 Consultation on the draft policy took place for 4 weeks from 25th September to the 20th of October 2023 through autumn 2023 with the aim to implement the policy for new applications from January 2024, and all funding via the new policy from September 2024.
- 22 The consultation was viewed by 115 people, with 30 people submitting a response. Of the 30 who submitted a response, 60% supported the revised policy, 23% opposed and 17% did not support or oppose.
- 23 Professionals made up 66% of responses. 65% of professionals supported the revised policy, 15% of professionals opposed and 20% did not support or oppose.
- 24 Parents made up 34% of responses. 44% of parents supported the revised policy, 44% of parents opposed and 11% did not support or oppose.
- 25 Respondent themes regarding policy benefits; the most common themes related to increased flexibility, child centred provision, early intervention and increased clarity.
- 26 Respondent themes regarding policy concerns; the most common themes related to timeliness of administration of the process and the policy not covering the full cost of 1:1 provision.
- 27 In response to the most common concern themes relating to timeliness of administration, the process for determining eligibility was streamlined during the pre-consultation stages in anticipation of this concern being raised. Approval via the Early Years Forum was removed in order to avoid delays. In response to the policy not

covering the full cost of 1:1 provision, children with the most complex needs requiring full time 1:1 support would go on to have an EHCP needs assessment which is out of the scope of this policy. This policy provides a contribution to additional support over and above ordinarily available provision and supports children with first concerns and SEND support plans as part of the graduated approach. This policy now makes clear that it is not intended to cover the full costs of additional staffing hours mitigating against the confusion.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 28 The Early years entitlements: local authority funding operational guide 2023 to 2024, Education and Skills Funding Agency (“the operational guidance”) sets out what local authorities must have regard to when discharging their duties to secure free early years provision and should be read alongside the statutory guidance from the DFE “Early education and childcare April 2023”.
- 29 Para 5.3 of the operational guidance under the heading ‘Allocation of funding’ provides as part of the preparation and review of their ‘local offer’, local authorities must consult with early years providers, parents and SEN specialists on how the SEN inclusion fund will be allocated. Under this ‘local offer’, local authorities should publish details on how the SENIF will be used to support their early years SEN cohort. These details should include the eligibility criteria for the fund, the planned value of the fund at the start of the year and the process for allocating the fund to providers.’
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-funding-2023-to-2024/early-years-entitlements-local-authority-funding-operational-guide-2023-to-2024>.
- 30 The outcome of the consultation was the majority of respondents supported the proposed policy.

Other Options Considered

- 31 No alternatives - Local authorities must consult with early years providers to set the value of their local SENIF.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	Failure to meet statutory duty	Very high
Consult	Meet statutory duty and develop policy that meets need	Very low

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 32 The Council is under a number of statutory duties under the Childcare Act 2006 including but not limited to - section 6 the local authority's duty to secure sufficient childcare for working parents; section 7 a duty to secure early years provision free of charge.
- 33 Local authorities are required to have Special Educational needs inclusion fund (SENIF) for all 3- and 4-year-olds with special educational needs (SEN) who are taking up the free entitlements, regardless of the number of hours taken. The funds are intended to support local authorities to work with providers to address the needs of individual children with SEN. The fund also supports local authorities to undertake their responsibilities to strategically commission SEN services as required under the Children and families Act 2014.
- 34 In order for the consultation to be fair there are guidance principles that must be followed, and these are known as the "Gunning Principles":
- The consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage.
 - Sufficient reasons must be given for the proposal to permit intelligent consideration and response.
 - Adequate time must be given for consideration and response.
 - The product of the consultation must be taken into account when finalising any proposals.
- 35 Legal services will continue to provide support as and when required.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 36 The SENIF schemes are funded through the council's DSG allocation.
- 37 The forecast expenditure for SENIF costs under this proposal is anticipated to be in line with current expenditure levels, so there are no financial implications or changes to the MTFS that are anticipated to be required.
- 38 The number of children progressing through to EHCP's is anticipated to reduce as a result of this change however, therefore potentially

- reducing the pressures on the High Needs funding and the DSG deficit.
- 39 As reported to committee the council’s DSG reserve deficit is at £46.9m at 31/3/2023 due to the pressures on high needs budget.
- 40 The council’s DSG Management Plan (approved at September 2022 Children and Families Committee) sets out the approach to the deficit.
- 41 The next version of the management plan will consider the impact of an improved SENIF offer.

Policy

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<p>An open and enabling organisation.</p> <p>Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making – We are seeking approval to consult on a new draft policy.</p> <p>Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation – We are proposing to change the way we support early years providers to improve inclusive practice by refocusing on quality provision and upskilling the workforce.</p>	<p>A council which empowers and cares about people.</p> <p>Support all children to have the best start in life – Our revised policy focuses on provision for individual children to meet their additional needs.</p> <p>Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential – Through providing bespoke additional funding we can ensure early years children get the best support from the offset of their education journey, removing barriers early and</p>	<p>A thriving and sustainable place.</p> <p>(Include which aim and priority)</p>
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	supporting independence.	
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 43 An Equality Impact Assessment has been finalised following the consultation.

Human Resources

- 44 None. Policy to be implemented by existing resources.

Risk Management

- 45 The policy will be overseen by Head of Service Early Years, Family Help & Prevention, Quality and Inclusion Lead and Childcare Development Manager.

Rural Communities

- 46 No specific implications for rural communities.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 47 This report has direct implications for children and young people, and cared for children with SEND aged 2-4 years.

Public Health

- 48 The resulting policy following consultation will have a positive overall impact on the health and wellbeing of Cheshire East residents, with the greatest impact on 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds with SEND and their families.

Climate Change

- 49 The existing statutory requirement to maintain a SENIF policy already helps the council to reduce energy consumption and promote healthy lifestyles through localised service delivery.

Access to Information

Contact Officer:	Danielle Holdcroft, Head of Service Early Years, Family Help & Prevention danielle.holdcroft@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Draft SENIF policy Appendix 2 – Consultation responses
Background Papers:	Early years entitlements: local authority funding operational guide 2023 to 2024, Education and Skills Funding Agency, para 5.3: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-funding-2023-to-2024/early-years-entitlements-local-authority-funding-operational-guide-2023-to-2024

Early Years Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF)

Policy for the
Support for children with special
educational needs and disabilities
accessing the early education
entitlements.

DRAFT 25th September 2023



Working for a brighter future together

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Cheshire East Council has a statutory duty to deliver a Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) to support early years providers in meeting the needs of individual children with SEN.
- 1.2. Support from the government for children to access early education and childcare:
 - 1.2.1. funding 15 hours a week of free childcare for all 3- and 4-year-olds
 - 1.2.2. funding 30 hours a week of free childcare for 3- and 4-year-olds in households where both parents work
 - 1.2.3. funding 15 hours a week of free childcare for all disadvantaged 2-year-olds – for 40% of all 2 year olds
 - 1.2.4. tax free childcare
 - 1.2.5. child tax credit entitlement.
- 1.3. This policy takes account of the increasing government support for children to access early education and childcare:
 - 1.3.1. April 2024 – 15 hours for working parents of 2-year olds.
 - 1.3.2. September 2024 - 15 hours for working parents of children 9 months plus.
 - 1.3.3. September 2025 - 30 hours for all working parents from 9 months to primary school age
 - 1.3.4. Increased access to wrap around childcare for school aged children.
- 1.4. Approximately 80% of the free early education entitlement in Cheshire East is delivered by the private / voluntary / independent sector, and 20% in schools.
- 1.5. SENIF supports the following corporate objectives:
 - 1.5.1. Support all children to have the best start in life.
 - 1.5.2. Increase the opportunities for children, young adults and adults with additional needs.
 - 1.5.3. Ensure all children to have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential.
 - 1.5.4. Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all.
- 1.6. An application for SENIF may be made for children accessing the Free Early Education Entitlements for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds in Cheshire East. The child does not need to be resident in Cheshire East but must access the Free Early Education Entitlement in Cheshire East.

1.7. Early Years SEND Offer - Levels of support.

1.7.1. **Tier 1 – Universal Help** - First Concerns – “Ordinarily Available Provision”. A provider would be expected to meet the needs of a child in this category using their own responses. Under exceptional circumstances where the provider demonstrates a need for support with their practice, support may be provided to enable practitioners to deliver Quality First Teaching and inclusive practice. This may be in the form of an assessment conversation carried out by a Portage, Quality and Inclusion Practitioner. Grant funding would not be provided.

1.7.2. **Tier 2 – Extra Help** - SEND Support – children with low and emerging needs where practitioners require support and training to meet those needs. This may be in the form of an assessment conversation carried out by a Portage, Quality and Inclusion Practitioner. Grant funding would not be provided.

1.7.3. **Tier 3 – Targeted Help**

1.7.3.1. Band A – **Transition support** – *for up to 10 weeks – SEND Notification from Health / Transferring Setting / Portage.* These children have special educational needs which require enhanced support so that they can access early education opportunities whilst their needs are being fully assessed for any further longer-term support. Maximum Funding £1,000 per term.

1.7.3.2. Band B – **Targeted Support** – These children will have special educational needs that will have an effect on their ability to actively engage with the nursery session without some support. Maximum Funding £1,500 per term.

1.7.3.3. Band C – **Enhanced Support** – These children will have complex and special educational needs that will have an effect on their ability to actively engage with the majority of the nursery session without enhanced support. Maximum Funding £2,700 per term.

1.7.3.4. Band D – **Resources and Equipment** - Some children with special educational needs may require specialist equipment to enable them to have full access to the Early Years Foundation Stage within their early years setting. Providers are required to make reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of all children. Funding is available in exceptional circumstances. Applications must be endorsed by the child’s physiotherapist or occupational therapist. Maximum Funding £2,000 (£5,000 by exception for complex and specialist help at Tier 4) per term.

1.7.4. **Tier 4 - Complex and Specialist Help** – Exceptional bespoke support. These children will require a totally individually designed curriculum in order to make expected progress and access all aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Their complex and special educational needs will have an effect on their ability to actively engage with all aspects of the nursery session without enhanced support. Maximum funding £5,500 per term.

- 1.8. Funding should be used to amend and adapt provision, enhancing the early years offer of inclusion. This may be for continuous professional development, purchase of identified resources, and enhanced ratios.

2. LEGAL AND BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

- 2.1. All grant decisions will be made based on the set of principles, set out in this Policy, and within the agreed budget approved by Council each year. The budget for the grants is managed carefully and flexibly to ensure that the Council has money available throughout the year. As far as possible the Council tries to ensure that no one is disadvantaged due to the time of year they apply.
- 2.2. Where financial support is provided by the Council, a contract will be issued to the childcare provider to confirm the grant funding to be made available for a specific child and support to be delivered by the childcare provider.

3. APPLICATION PROCESS

- 3.1. Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities accessing early education provision operates within set criteria, agreed by the Director of Strong Start, Family Help and Integration and relevant Council Officers in line with the Council's Corporate Outcomes.

How to apply

- 3.2. Applications for Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities accessing the Free Early Education Entitlement must be made by the childcare provider, not the child's parent / carer, using the Council's application form and associated guidance notes that are available on the Council's website.
- 3.3. The application form must be completed in full. Incomplete application forms will not be considered, which could cause a delay or defer to your application. Supporting documentation (listed on the application form) may also be requested prior to the application being fully considered. Failure to supply all required documentation will result in the application being treated as incomplete.
- 3.4. The closing dates for receipt and acceptance of complete applications are published on the Cheshire East council website.
- 3.5. Grants cannot be paid retrospectively. Any work commenced prior to acceptance of the grant offer will not be eligible for funding.

3.6. All successful applicants will be required to complete a post grant monitoring report as set out in section 5.0 of this Policy.

What can be funded?

3.7. Where a child is eligible for funding as set out in 1.7 and subject to any specific requirements set out in the funding agreement for an individual child, grant spend may include transition support, enhancing staff ratios, key person time to engage with specialist support from outside agencies, developmentally appropriate resources, training and upskilling the workforce.

3.8. What cannot be grant funded?

3.8.1. Funding of a childcare place

3.8.2. 1:1 support unless specified in an EHCP or has the most complex and enhanced support requirements confirmed in the contract

3.8.3. Standard inclusive practice

3.9. Who can apply?

3.10. To qualify for a grant organisations must meet the criteria listed below:

3.10.1. Must be an early education and childcare provider¹ within the Cheshire East area.

3.10.2. Provide value for money;

3.10.3. Have a set of audited accounts, or as a minimum an organisation bank statement, and are able to provide such information as the Council reasonably requires in order to satisfy the Council as to the organisation's financial position;

3.10.4. If a voluntary sector organisation, have a management committee with an up-to-date Governing Document which must be signed by at least two members of the committee who are unrelated to each other.

3.10.5. Have appropriate safeguarding policies relevant to their organisation;

3.10.6. Have a bank or building society account in the name of the organisation applying;

3.10.7. Complete the current application form in full, providing all required information.

3.11. Criteria for Funding / support

3.11.1. Providers are required to demonstrate that the provision required for the child is significantly beyond high-quality inclusive practice and will be measured against incremental descriptors.

¹ 'Provider' means; an early year's provider registered on the Ofsted Early Years Register, a childminder registered on the Ofsted Early Years Register, a childminder registered with a childminder agency which is itself registered with Ofsted, or schools taking children aged two and over which are exempt from registration with Ofsted as an early years provider.

3.11.2. SENIF is a contribution towards meeting the needs identified in the application and should be used in conjunction with other funding streams such as the Disability Access Fund (DAF) and Early Years Pupil Premium.

3.11.3. Consideration for funding may be triggered by SEND notification from Health, evidence of graduated response, Assess-Plan-Do-Review cycle, child presenting difficulties in at least one of the four broad areas of need, and significant and persistent delay in meeting milestones.

3.12. General Conditions

- 3.16.1. All grants will be subject to a contract.
- 3.16.2. Grants are classed as one-off and should not be seen as repeat funding.
- 3.16.3. Grants are valid for a period set out in the contract and will be paid in advance of completion of the project.
- 3.16.4. Organisations must be able to participate in a monitoring process and provide monitoring information to evidence how the grant money has been spent and adherence to the conditions of the grant. This must include receipts or invoices and a written report of the project.
- 3.16.5. Organisations must notify the Council of any changes in circumstances which affect their financial position throughout the period in which the grant monies are being used.
- 3.16.6. The grant must only be used for the purposes specifically stated in the application form and agreed in the contract. Should it be spent in any other way, without written approval from the Council, the organisation may be asked to return some, or all of the monies paid.
- 3.16.7. If a successful application is cancelled or only partially achieved, or if the organisation is wound up, some or all of the grant may be recovered by the Council.
- 3.16.8. All conditions under which the grant has been awarded, including any Special Conditions, must be met. Failure to do so could result in the organisation being asked to repay the grant monies to the Council.

4. DECISION MAKING PROCESS

- 4.1. The grant applications will be assessed on a monthly schedule by the Early Years Quality and Inclusion Coordinator, in consultation with officers from other council departments as appropriate, against a scoring criteria based on the priorities outlined in 1.7.
- 4.2. Having assessed all applications a Recommendations Report is prepared by the Early Years Quality & Inclusion Lead for final approval by the Head of Service for Early Years, Family Help and Prevention in line with the Council's financial scheme of delegation.

- 4.3. Organisations will be notified to inform them of whether they have been recommended for approval or not. The outcome of the decision will be notified to organisations within 3 weeks of the application.
- 4.4. Appeals –
- 4.4.1. In the first instance, appeals should be addressed to earlyyearssenhelpline@cheshireeast.gov.uk for consideration by the Early Years Quality and Inclusion Coordinator and Early Years Quality & Inclusion Lead.
- 4.4.2. Where an organisation or parent continues to disagree with the award decision, concerns will be considered by the Cheshire East Early Years Forum who may request additional supporting information. The appeal will be determined by the Head of Service for Early Years, Family Help and Prevention. A response will be provided within 8 weeks of receiving the official appeal.
- 4.5. Complaints and compliments about any aspect of the grant process will be dealt with under the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure. A copy of the Council's Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions Policy is available from the Council's website.

5. MONITORING AND RECORD KEEPING

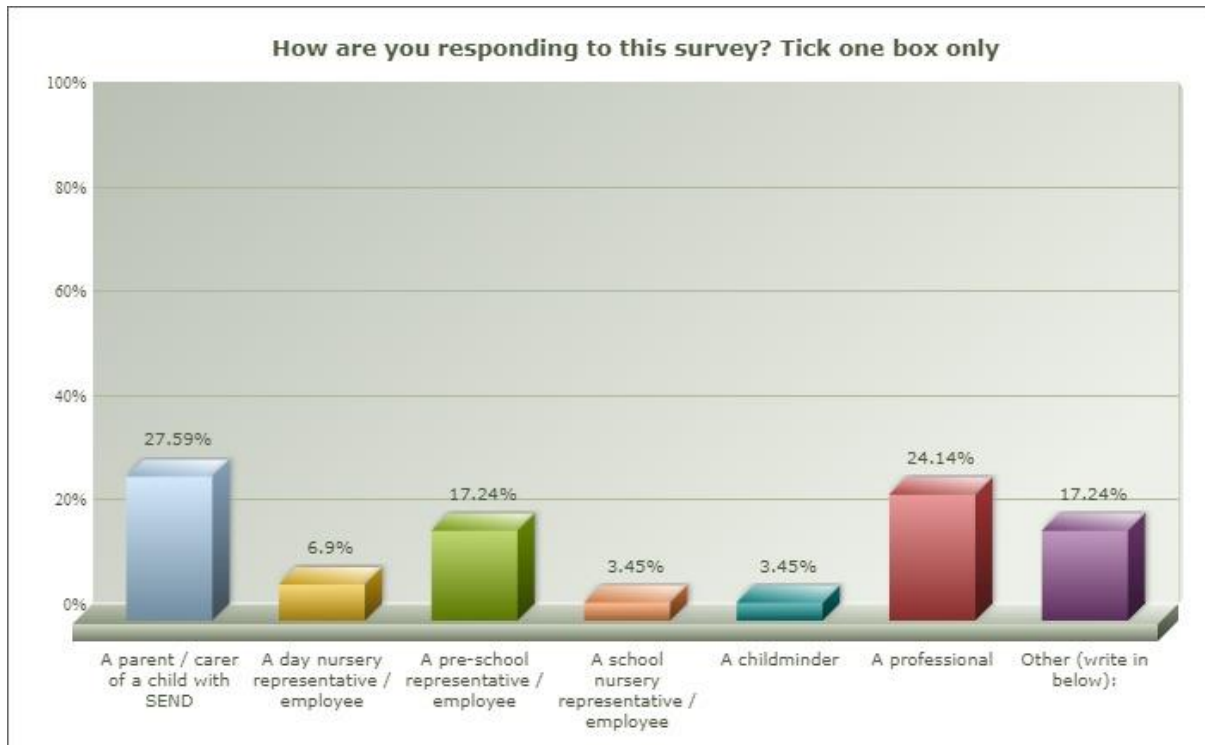
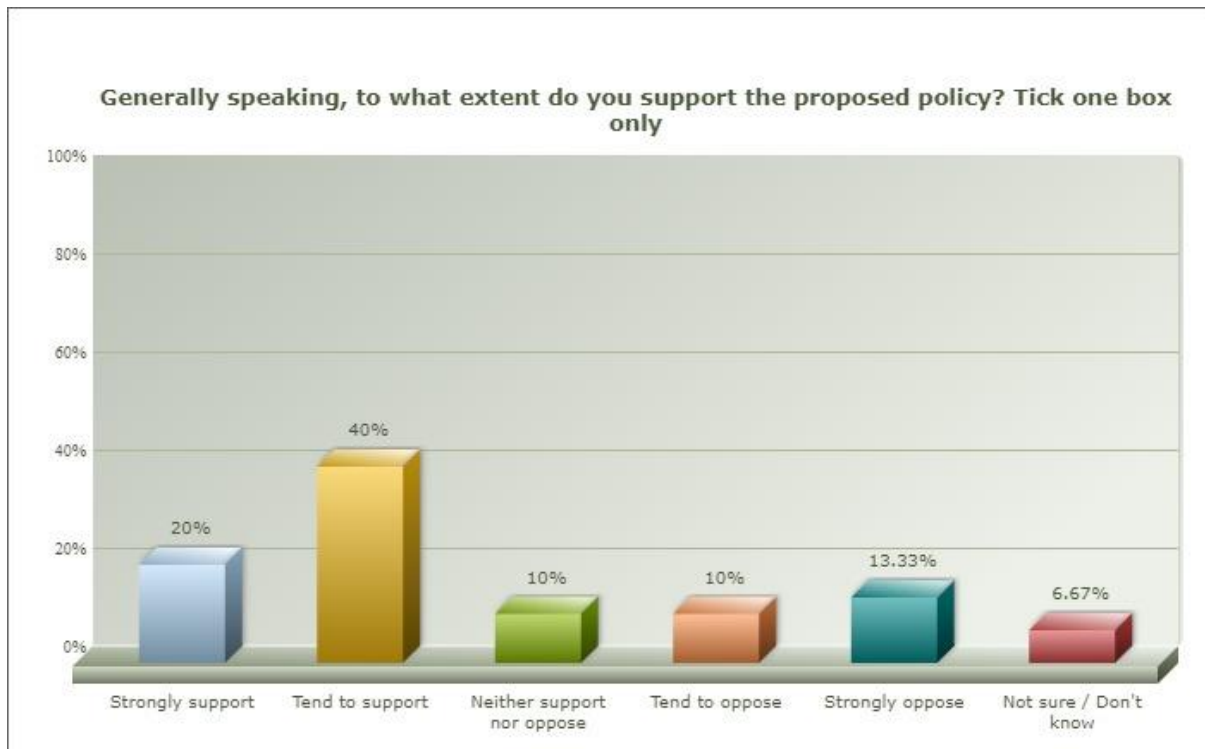
- 5.1. Following a successful application and in order to ensure that monies are used in an appropriate manner, a monitoring report will be required following project completion. This report shall include, but shall not be limited to, how the grant money was used and what difference the funding made.
- 5.2. Invoices, receipts and photographs must be made available to the Council on request.
- 5.3. Invoices or receipts dated prior to the date of the funding contract will not be accepted or reimbursed.
- 5.4. The Council reserves the right to monitor the use of the grant and ask for evidence to support an application.
- 5.5. The organisation must allow reasonable access to premises/accounts upon request from the Council.
- 5.6. Organisations must retain records relating to the grant for an appropriate period (to be confirmed in the contract).

5.7. If organisations do not supply satisfactory monitoring reports and supporting information in full and within the set time scale, they may be asked to repay the grant funding to the Council. Failure to comply with the conditions of this grant may be taken into account when considering any further applications for grant funding made by the same organisation in the future.

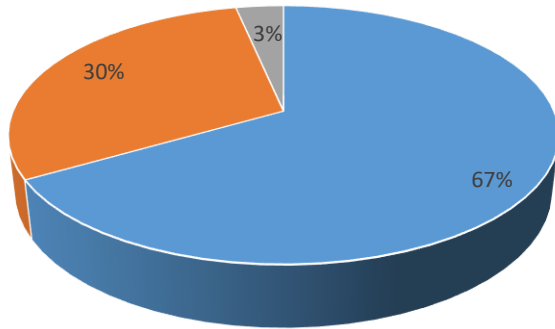
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Appendix 2

Consultation responses

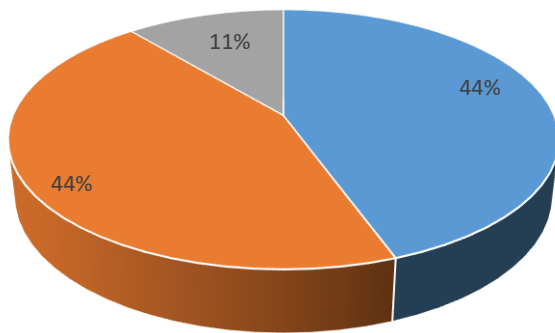


Respondents



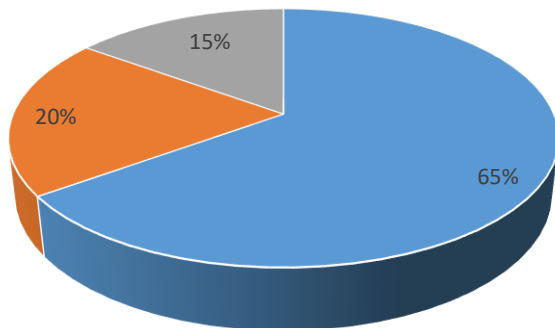
■ Professionals ■ Parents ■ No answer

Parent responses by type



■ Support ■ Oppose ■ Neither support nor oppose

Professionals responses by type



■ Support ■ Oppose ■ Neither support nor oppose

Table of comments:

Q. Please highlight the parts of the policy that you feel will bring about the most beneficial changes for children and families, and why:
I would like to see it all in practice first and see if it all works.
I have not been able to view the policy itself, I'm afraid However, I am very much in favour of the focus going to practitioners who can capably and professional deliver interventions. The added benefit is that the workforce will be upskilled, for the benefit of all children and families.
Funding for children based on need. Clear monitoring process to ensure accountability for expenditure to improve outcomes for children Targeted support for the most disabled children, Policy is about overcoming barriers to children accessing provisions.
That funding is inclusive and that the government have made changes to support children.
clarity for parents and school staff
Moving to a more flexible support system
That the funding given to the provider will help the child have access to suitable resources and equipment and give families the opportunity for children to have a happy early years experience.
Enable all children with SEND, and their families, to get the support they need in a timely manner
Funding the providers of care/support settings for special needs children.
Currently the system of allocation of funding is not sustainable for our more complex children who require 1:1 support throughout the session. Settings that are financially sustainable can offer the best environment for the child. So an increase in funding can only be beneficial to the child as long as the correct decisions are made as to which band they fall into.

The whole scheme will be beneficial as there is a focus on early help and intervention rather than EHCP SEND funding as the only option. It will support with transitions where often children are stuck or forced into transition timetables.

There should be extra funding to that currently available

Children who have a physical special need will benefit from grant money to buy equipment to support them.

I'm not sure what you are proposing financially as you haven't spelled out what this means but the current funding we receive for SEN children is woefully inadequate. It really annoys me that you always put the contracts in terms of hours to the parents and this is their expectation of support. Your funding works out at £9 per hour which is surely illegal given that minimum wage is £10.42 per hour. You also only fund for 38 weeks of the year when we are open for 51 weeks. We are now in the situation where we are writing a policy to charge parents the missing money since as a business we cannot fund the gap between what you pay and what the parents expect ourselves. It will then be the parents' choice to either reduce the number of days the child is in the nursery or pay the difference for the extra support the child needs. This is the sad situation that your council fiscal policy has reduced us to. It used to be sustainable when we only had one or two children with SEN but unfortunately we are seeing more now. We don't want to exclude these children from our settings but without the correct support in some cases, it becomes a safety issue for themselves and other children. The Council urgently needs to acknowledge the TRUE cost of providing one-to-one support for children with SEN needs in early years settings and finance it properly. To dress it up as a contribution to the setting is quite frankly an insult to early years providers and the end result is going to be that children with additional needs are going to struggle to find a setting that will take them on. With minimum wage increasing every year, the gap just gets wider and wider between the funding and the cost per hour of employing someone. This is the actual reality of trying to run a business in the early years sector. If you couldn't employ a member of staff on your Team for £9 per hour why do you expect that we can?

I am not aware of any significant changes as compared to the previous funding but this policy does seem clear and the tiers and procedures make logical sense.

Most beneficial thing is that funding isn't being reduced even further!!

Changing from the confusing hours to a banding.

Removing the misleading number of hours.

The first level would be helpful providing support whilst evidence is gathered.

At the moment I receive funding as a childminder to support a child by keeping my ratio under those I am able to allow me to give said child more time and a smaller setting. Not sure how this will work using this system and afraid said child will miss out as will then have to increase numbers. Doesn't benefit childminders in their approach

Ensuring that any funding received is used appropriately by all settings.

More flexibility for settings to meet the child's needs

it will be far more flexible and therefore able to help more children with special needs

Schools will have flexibility to use funding in the best way for their children's needs.

Q. Please highlight any parts of the policy that you feel may have a negative impact for children and families, and why:

As above, I would like to see it in practice first.

The whole policy seems to be aiming to reduce spending rather than support needs. I have read extensive feedback from parents in authorities using this approach and it is overwhelmingly negative.

The possibility that unscrupulous settings will not use the funds to genuinely support the child. The concern that some Settings may not have the skilled workforce, no matter how good the training. Most importantly, the general issue around recruitment and retention in the industry. It could be detrimental to place even more demand on staff who are already stretched.

No inclusion of SALT. Development of communication is key to children's long term development. Communication resources may need to be purchased to support pupils especially those with complex needs, e.g Widget software to produce symbols, as well as staff training. Band C and Band D are unclear. Can settings apply for Enhanced support and Resources and Equipment. Equipment can come at a very high cost-over £2500 for a specialised seating system. Equipment-who will own it and will it move with the child?

The lack of individual focus in funding means that the child's needs could get lost and/or the finance is diluted so we cannot meet children's needs -it is already a challenge for schools!

Paperwork issues with the way the panel looks at paperwork it could be terms before a child gets support for a paperwork error. Paperwork is too long and repetitive

Concerns about how 1:1 help is apportioned. Have experienced where only 12 hours of 15 have been funded as it has been concluded the child can be with his peers for those hours. This would be a safeguarding issue for the child as needs constant support. Interesting how those hours get decided. This would have a negative impact for the child as he would be unsafe if the setting did not provide 1:1 support for those hours (which it did) irrespective of funding,

Not a negative impact but more of accessibility. The policy does not detail availability and accessibility. We can easily say that the care providers have been funded. But in reality is we still have a very tough time finding the right care providers. We cant access support from within 10-20 miles from where we live. There isnt SEN practitioners in the settings - nursery, after s school care etc

No negative impact for children and families as long as the process is workable and not time consuming in a current ever changing system. Training on the new paperwork is also necessary. I would like to know if settings can be part of the decision making process as we know the child best. Panels of professionals who may not have had recent experience of the current way that children are presenting due to Covid and other social difficulties cannot possibly assess which band they fall into without seeing them in person. Paperwork is long and often admin based and it is hard to portray the child on paper sometimes. Many years ago settings were invited to panel meetings to put forward the case for the child.

If the funding ids less than that currently availablethe use of a ' banding. ' system does not make it clear to the lay person

Each year we have children with a range of difficulties that make progress slow or nonexistant without 1-1 support. These children would not be safe or their peers would not be safe without 1-1 support. It is almost imposible to get an EHCP for these children and a one off payment would NOT meet their needs.

Not providing funding to support children who are a danger to themselves or other children would result in settings saying that they can't meet the needs of the child which is discrimiantory. There will be more pressure on staff regarding paperwork and supporting these children.If 1-1 support is not available for children who need it existing staff's mental wellbeing will be compromised.

See my comments above. Without adequate funding, we will have to ask parents to contribute to any extra help that their child needs. If they can't afford this, then they will end up having to reduce their days which puts the child at a disadvantage.

In Section 1.6 it says that an application for SENIF may be made for children accessing the Free Early Education Entitlements for 2, 3 and 4 year olds in Cheshire East. I think it should be made clear here that children who fulfill all the other requirements, but are not receiving FEEE as their nursery has opted out of this system, are still entitled to SENIF. There may need to be stipulations around the fact the council do not fund the placement, but these children are still entitled to SEN support.

1.7.3.3 Not sure if I have calculated this correctly, but for a child needing enhanced support, the funding quoted would cover about 2 days of full time support a week. What / who would be responsible for paying for that necessary support for the rest of the week? Or is it purely linked to the free 15 PEEE hours? However, a child's SEN is not only present for 15 hours a week.

How wide are these 'bands'? I sounds like a very generally and random approach. Cheshire east need to unblur their policies regarding SEN, not make them more complicated!

The way this is worded makes me concerned that setting will have to keep applying for the additional funds and that the funding will be set at a lower level, which can be gradually increased. This will make it more difficult for parents to find settings willing to accept their children due to the costs associated.

At the moment I receive funding as a childminder to support a child by keeping my ratio under those I am able to allow me to give said child more time and a smaller setting. Not sure how this will work using this system and afraid said child will miss out as will then have to increase numbers. Doesn't benefit childminders in their approach

Higher expectations to provide support without funding.
We provide whatever a child needs regardless of funding, but I'm not convinced that all settings have the same attitude.

May mean they get less 1-1 adult support

The fact that parents are unable to be involved in the application process- parents need to be able to retain control over having a say in their child's educational needs

The fact 1:1 support is being withdrawn and not available is one of the worst decisions that can be made for SEND children, many cannot function or engage in learning without the support and direction and 'safety' of an adult. This disrupts their learning and that of the other children around them.

It's difficult for a layperson to understand the draft but it does sound as if the grants have to continually be applied for. Children identified as having additional needs will always have those needs and having to constantly apply puts more pressure and paperwork onto already pressured teaching staff and staff at Cheshire East. Many applications simply won't get processed meaning it is our children who miss out.

The draft doesn't appear to talk about specialist provision. It sounds as if the idea is to fund mainstream schools to make adaptations. As a mum of a boy who had to move to special school in Year 4, I know this doesn't work. Mainstream schools don't have the space, the specialist staff or resources to cater for the needs of SEND children and more funding needs to be put into specialist provision if these children are to grow into adults with meaningful lives and jobs.

Hopefully it will not mean that some children might miss out if the times are not always the same each week.