



# Proposals to develop the SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan 2025-27 (September 2024)

## Purpose of Report

This report seeks endorsement on the proposed process and timeline for developing the new Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Strategy and Improvement Plan 2025-27.

## Background

The current *Cheshire East Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2021 – 2025* was co-produced with a wide range of key stakeholders and sets out how, as a local 0-25 SEND partnership, we will drive developments to our services so that we support children and young people with SEND to achieve the best possible outcomes. Originally prepared as *The SEND strategy 2021 – 2024* and approved in November 2021, the document was refreshed in April 2023 to reflect significant changes within the national and local landscape for SEND. Following the review and refresh of the SEND strategy, 5 priority areas were identified as our focus for action over the next 12/18 months and 5 workstreams were established to drive forward these action areas.

Since the April 2023 strategy refresh, there have been further major national and local changes relating to SEND and wider people services, including:

- **Work to address increasing financial pressure on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)** - the council took part in the Department for Education's (DfE) Delivering Better Value programme (DBV) during 2022/23. However, despite our engagement, the opportunities identified within the DBV programme combined with the mitigations in the DSG management plan at that time were not sufficient to address the recurring in-year overspends and deficit position. Later in 2023, Cheshire East Council were invited to take part in the DfE's Safety Valve intervention programme. Council colleagues worked with a DfE advisor to build on the work and priority areas identified through the DBV programme; additional improvement actions were identified and the DSG management plan was fundamentally rewritten. Council colleagues submitted the revised DSG management plan to DfE in January 2024 along with 9 Project Initiation Documents (PIDs; which outlined improvement objectives and actions) and a capital bid. Whilst Ministers decided they were unable to enter into an agreement with Cheshire East at that time, the DfE recognise that the forecasted DSG deficit poses a substantial risk to Cheshire East and they therefore proposed to work with us, alongside colleagues from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), with the aim of finding an appropriate solution. In the meantime, their ask is for Cheshire East to continue to develop and implement the previously submitted plans to aid a more sustainable high needs system. We therefore need to ensure that improvement actions identified through this work are captured in a single SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan going forward.
- **Completing our self-evaluation and identifying areas for development** – As part of our ongoing standard evaluation activity, alongside inspection preparation activities, colleagues across the SEND Partnership regularly update our SEND self-evaluation to ensure that it reflects recent improvements and feedback. SEND improvement actions from a previous iteration of our self-evaluation were captured through a drafted



improvement plan presented to the SEND Executive Leadership Board. We need to ensure that our new SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan address the areas for development identified in our most recent self-evaluation, along with any actions that may still be needed from the previously drafted SEND Improvement Plan.

- **ILACS inspection and Improvement Plan** – An Ofsted inspection in February and March 2024 gave Cheshire East’s children’s services an overall grading of inadequate. A comprehensive *Children’s Services Improvement Plan* has been agreed which clearly sets out the actions that will be taken to address the inspection findings and improve our offer for children and young people. To aid consistency and joint working, we will aim to align the content and format of our SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan, and monitoring activity, with this document.
- **National improvement work** - activity has been taking place nationally to develop and pilot the recommendations set out in the DfE’s *SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan* published in March 2023. It is not yet known if or how the July 2024 change in national government will affect the implementation of this plan.

Our aim is to review all of the above work and produce a single **SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan** that clearly pulls together and outlines in a single document all of the improvement work to be carried out by the SEND Partnership over the next 3 years.

Our required improvement work is a fundamental change programme that will affect the whole system and will require all partners to work as one. We know that we must do this for financial sustainability, but most importantly because our children and young people deserve to have the right education and support, in the right provision, at the right time, in order to support them to prepare for adulthood and to achieve successful outcomes.

## Area SEND Inspection

We are currently on high alert for an area SEND inspection in Cheshire East. The main purpose of the inspection is for Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to:

- evaluate the effectiveness of the local area partnership’s arrangements for children and young people with SEND
- where appropriate, recommend what the local area partnership should do to improve the arrangements

Inspectors will review **how effectively we work together as a partnership** in our local area of Cheshire East to improve the **experiences** and **outcomes** of children and young people with SEND.

Our ‘local area partnership’ includes everyone in **education, health and care** involved in the strategic planning, commissioning, management, delivery and evaluation of arrangements for children and young people with SEND in Cheshire East.

Previously, Ofsted and CQC carried out a joint local area SEND inspection of Cheshire East in March 2018. This inspection identified two areas of significant weakness in Cheshire East (the timeliness, process and quality of EHC plans; and the lack of an effective autism pathway and unreasonable waiting times), and the local area was required to produce and submit a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) to Ofsted which set out the actions to address the significant areas of weakness. In May 2021, Ofsted and CQC carried out a SEND re-visit and judged that, as a local area, Cheshire East had made sufficient progress in addressing the two areas of significant weaknesses identified at our 2018 inspection.

## Current Areas for Development

We are currently finalising the latest update of our SEND and AP self-evaluation, but several key areas of development have already been identified through our existing self-evaluation





## New strategy and improvement plan development and timeline

The steps in developing the new SEND and AP Strategy and Improvement Plan are set out below. Whilst we had previously planned to launch a new SEND strategy in September 2025, we feel a new strategy and single improvement plan is required sooner due to the significant local and national SEND development outlined in the [‘Background’](#) section. It is planned that the new strategy and improvement plan will be launched in January 2025.

What we need to do	How we need to do it
<b>Establish where we are now</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review progress against our previous strategy and identify any areas that still need development.</li> <li>• Review progress against improvement activities identified through DBV and Safety Valve and identify areas that still need further development.</li> <li>• Review progress against development actions previously identified within the SEF (and SEND improvement plan) and assess where improvement work is still required.</li> <li>• Update our self-evaluation (SEF) with the latest information on our strengths and areas for development.</li> <li>• Compare our current performance against where we were and our neighbouring areas/those with similar geography and populations, along with where we need to be (as outlined in our most recent DSG management plan).</li> <li>• Review recent feedback on the current position from key stakeholders, including staff across education, health and care, parents/carers and young people.</li> <li>• Consider external findings from inspection, monitoring and peer review, including DfE support.</li> </ul>
<b>Identify what’s important / urgent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To have the maximum impact, we will need to decide which areas for development we feel are most important / urgent so that we can effectively target our resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Agree what we want to achieve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once we have agreed our areas of priority, we will need to outline what we want to improve/change in relation to these, i.e. what will be different in three – four years if our strategy is successful? We will use this to agree how we will measure the success of our strategy and build these success measures into our quality assurance and performance management arrangements.</li> </ul>
<b>Agree how to achieve our priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify resources, i.e. what staffing, provision and resources we have to achieve our strategy.</li> <li>• Agree what actions we will take, who will lead these and by what timescale.</li> </ul>
<b>Finalise and launch the strategy and improvement plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the strategy is presented at key partnerships and forums.</li> <li>• Publish the strategy on the website.</li> </ul>
<b>Check our strategy and improvement plan is working</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to ensure that the strategy and improvement plan are meeting the planned outcomes through quality assurance and performance management arrangements.</li> </ul>