

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

09 June 2025

Cheshire East SEND and AP 'One Plan'

Report of: Claire Williamson - Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration

Report Reference No: CF/12/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All wards

Decision / Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report asks committee to approve the final version of the Cheshire East Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Partnership's SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy and Development Plan, referred to as the Cheshire East SEND and AP 'One Plan', including the high level priorities identified within this document and the associated reporting mechanisms for tracking progress against this plan.
- 2 The developments detailed in our proposed SEND and AP 'One Plan' contribute to the delivery of commitment 2 '*Improving health and wellbeing*' of the Cheshire East Plan 2025-2029, and most specifically '*2.4 Children and young people thrive and reach their potential with targeted support when and where they need it*'.

Executive Summary

- 3 The current Cheshire East Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2021 – 2025 was last refreshed in April 2023. Due to the timescale of our current strategy, and major national and local changes relating to SEND and wider people services that have occurred since this date (including a clear focus on managing our Dedicated Schools Grant), a new strategy which brings together all SEND development actions and which is aligned with the partnership's most recent evaluation, activity and feedback is required. This report seeks

agreement on the contents of a new single SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy and Development Plan, known as the Cheshire East SEND and AP 'One Plan', and reporting mechanisms to track progress against this plan.

- 4 The SEND and AP 'One Plan' aims to ensure development actions undertaken through the partnership are completed effectively and at pace, and support the achievement of best outcomes for children and young people with SEND within a financially sustainable framework (in line with achieving a balanced budget by 2031).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the contents of the Cheshire East SEND and AP 'One Plan', including agreeing the high-level priorities of: *Right Support in the Right Place at the Right Time*
2. Agree the proposed ongoing reporting mechanisms for the Cheshire East SEND and AP 'One Plan'

Background

- 5 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 would drive developments to our services to 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.
- 6 Since the April 2023 strategy refresh, there have been further major national and local changes relating to SEND and wider people services, including:
 - (a) **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 a Safety Valve agreement with Cheshire East at that time, a DfE advisor continued to work with us on our improvement journey. We have ensured that improvement actions identified through this work (which are still being delivered) are captured in the proposed single SEND and AP Strategy and Plan going forward.

- (b) **Completing our self-evaluation and identifying areas for development** – As part of our ongoing standard evaluation activity, alongside wider 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 previous SEND Executive Leadership Board. We have needed to ensure that our new SEND and AP Strategy and 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. A refreshed SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) is also being finalised, and we have further feedback from partnership SEND surveys, which also inform our future development actions and plan.
- (c) **ILACS inspection and Improvement Plan** – An Ofsted inspection in February - 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 have aimed to align the content and format of our SEND and AP Strategy and Development Plan, and monitoring activity, with this document.
- (d) **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, and we have continued to monitor this activity. It is not yet known if or how the July 2024 change in national government will affect the implementation of this plan (although the Education Committee has a further ongoing inquiry on 'Solving the SEND Crisis', which we will monitor as it continues).

(e) **Wider Council improvement work and regional health work** – we need to ensure that our plans align with ongoing work being undertaken within the council's transformation programme and health improvements across Cheshire and Merseyside.

- 7 Recent work has been focused on reviewing all of the above work and producing a single SEND and AP Strategy and Development Plan that clearly pulls together and outlines in a single document all of the improvement work to be carried out by the SEND Partnership during 2025 – 2028.
- 8 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.

Consultation and Engagement

- 9 The Business Development Manager tasked with co-ordinating development of the partnership's SEND and AP 'One Plan' has engaged with colleagues across the partnership through development meetings and emails to review actions from previous action plans to determine whether individual actions had been completed, or were no longer needed for other reasons, or were still required. Where actions were still required, joint working was undertaken to combine actions (where appropriate) and/or to amend actions to ensure they were SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound). This work resulted in an initial draft document of identified actions grouped into 14 sections across 3 priority areas: 1. Right Support, 2. Right Place and 3. Right Time.
- 10 Three multi-agency "*Working TOGETHER on our Cheshire East SEND and AP 'One Plan'*" sessions were held on 3 – 5 March 2025 with a total of 85 attendees. To ensure an even mix of different representatives in each session, specific teams and groups from across the partnership were allocated specific numbers of places in each session and invited to identify suitable representatives. During the sessions, attendees were asked to vote on a name for the action plan part of the 'One Plan' and worked through the proposed actions in key cross-cutting themed areas. Following the session, all proposed actions were circulated to all attendees for an opportunity to provide further reflective or detailed feedback on the proposals.
- 11 During the 'working TOGETHER' sessions, attendees were asked to vote on the action plan part of the document from options including: improvement plan, development plan, implementation plan or something

else. The most commonly selected response, with 39% of votes, was development plan, closely followed by improvement plan (31%) and implementation plan (22%), with only 8% choosing something else (with suggestions including 'progress plan' or simply 'action plan'). As a result of this feedback, we are proposing that our SEND and AP 'One Plan' acts as our SEND and AP Strategy and Development Plan.

Reasons for Recommendations

Approve the Cheshire East SEND and AP 'One Plan', including the high level priorities

- 12 The proposed single SEND and AP Strategy and Development Plan incorporates all mitigations identified in the DSG Management Plan as required during 2025-2028 (noting that the DSG Management Plan is a 7 year plan) and clearly pulls together and outlines in a single document all of the improvement work to be carried out by the SEND Partnership up to and including the calendar year 2028, building on various previous action plans (as outlined in the 'background' section above). In doing so, we will remove any confusion regarding multiple SEND improvement action plans and positively focus our resources in order to achieve successful improvements at pace.
- 13 SEND and AP 'One Plan' is a clear, simple name that we feel can be easily understood by all partners and clearly reflects both the concept of pulling all actions into a single document, and all partners working as one with a shared vision to deliver our improvements.
- 14 The latest draft of the Cheshire East SEND and AP 'One Plan' is attached in Appendix 1. The format of the development plan intentionally mirrors that used for the wider Children's services Improvement Plan, due to the crossover in individuals and organisations that are involved in delivery and oversight of both documents.
- 15 Our 'One Plan' is intended to drive significant and sustainable cultural change in local support for children and young people with SEND and those that use alternative provision and therefore, whilst it acknowledges our journey to date, recent improvements, the current circumstances and persisting areas for development, the actions contained within it are consciously forward thinking and spaced over several years going forward.
- 16 We do not intend to change our vision for children and young people with SEND (which is the same for all children and young people in Cheshire East: ***"Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young"***) or our partnership commitment to want all our children and young people with SEND to be **HAPI** (**H**appy and healthy, **A**chieving their potential, **P**art of their communities and **I**ndependent as possible, making

choices about their future) as both were previously co-produced and are still equally valid today.

- 17 Our vision for children and young people also outlines that ‘we believe that Cheshire East families and communities are strong and resilient, with the right **help**, by the right **people**, at the right **time**’. Our DSG management plan mitigations all have a shared aim of delivering the right **support** in the right **place** at the right **time**. This also aligns with ongoing national SEND improvement work as outlined in the national ‘SEND and AP Improvement Plan: Right **Support**, Right **Place**, Right **Time**’. Finally, the council’s new Cheshire East Plan 2025 – 2029 also includes a priority area of ‘Children and young people thrive and reach their potential with targeted **support when** and **where** they need it’.
- 18 The first task in developing our SEND and AP One Plan involved building on all of the previous work that has been undertaken around SEND over the last few years and collating all actions from our current or previous SEND action plans (each informed by both internal partnership feedback and external feedback, plus a variety of co-production and joint working), and attempting to group these into related themed areas. This work then continued in collaboration with colleagues across the partnership in order to prepare an initial draft set of actions (as outlined in the ‘Consultation and Engagement’ section above).
- 19 Upon working through our themed action areas, it was clear that they also naturally aligned with the priorities of the **right support** in the **right place** in the **right time**, which also align with priorities in both local and national plans for children and young people with SEND.
- 20 The initial draft of our ‘One Plan’ was further developed and finalised through various meetings and contact routes, including ‘working TOGETHER’ sessions, submitted feedback, board meetings, and meetings with different representatives.

Agree the proposed ongoing reporting mechanisms

- 21 As outlined in the SEND and AP ‘One Plan’ document, the development plan will be a live and responsive plan, so will adapt to incorporate new actions as needed. It will also be regularly updated in order to accurately capture and reflect the current status and impact of each action within it.
- 22 As with the format of the development plan, it is intended that reporting for this plan uses recognised project management tracking techniques and also learns from and mirrors good practice utilised by the Children’s Services Improvement and Impact Board to monitor progress against the wider Children’s Services Improvement Plan.

- 23 Sections 10 and 11 of our SEND and AP 'One Plan' cover how we will measure impact, plus governance and accountability arrangements.
- 24 The latest version of our SEND and AP 'One Plan', with latest action RAG ratings and activity / impact information, will be circulated to members of the SEND and AP Partnership Board and SEND Executive Oversight Panel ahead of each meeting of the respective group, alongside an action RAG summary document and a highlight report pulling out key activity, progress, impact and action change information.
- 25 In addition, we will incorporate key monitoring measures / performance indicators (KPIs) for the 'One Plan' into our updated SEND performance information (which is currently under development), and this will also be circulated to members of the SEND and AP Partnership Board and SEND Executive Oversight Panel ahead of each meeting, along with an updated risk and issue register.
- 26 Children and Families Committee members have received regular updates to date on progress against the DSG management plan. Regular updates of progress against the SEND and AP 'One Plan' will be shared for scrutiny and challenge with the Children and Families Committee, the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board, and the Health and Care Partnership Board.

Other Options Considered

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Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing – do not proceed with the proposed 'One Plan'	The current Cheshire East SEND Strategy 2021 – 2025 will expire this year, and work to refresh this strategy is therefore a requirement.	Continuing with multiple action plans in different formats would lead to continued confusion and lack of clarity around both the partnership's priorities and the reporting / governance arrangements for improvement activity. Pulling all actions into a single plan owned and understood by all partners, with a single reporting format, resolves these issues.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 28 While there are no direct legal implications as a result of the recommendations in this report, it is acknowledged that Delivery Leads for individual development actions will be required to give due consideration to legislation, relevant statutory regulations and guidance during delivery of their assigned actions.
- 29 Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 ('the Act') sets out the legal duties on the local area partnership (the local authority, health partners, settings, schools and colleges) to identify and meet the needs of children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND. The Act, together with associated regulations, are underpinned by statutory guidance – 'Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years - Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities – January 2025'.
- 30 'Local area partnership' refers to those in education, health and care who are responsible for the strategic planning, commissioning, management, delivery, and evaluation of arrangements for children and young people with SEND who live in a local area.
- 31 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) carry out joint inspections of local areas at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1) (a) of the Children Act 2004.
- 32 Inspectors assess the extent to which the local area partners are complying with relevant legal duties relating to arrangements for children and young people with SEND. Relevant legal duties may include duties under the Children and Families Act 2014, the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998. The relevant guidance is Area SEND inspections; framework and handbook (updated 5 April 2024).
- 33 Under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the council has a statutory duty to use resources efficiently and effectively against priorities and to achieve a balanced budget. Section 28 (budget monitoring: general) of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Council to review its calculations from time to time during the year and to take such action, if any, as it considers necessary to deal with any deterioration in its financial position.
- 34 The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is paid to the Council by the Secretary of State under section 14 of the Education Act 2002 (power of Secretary of State to give financial assistance for purposes related to education or children etc.). The purposes of the financial assistance are

set out at s14(2) of the Education Act 2002. The grant is paid as a ring fenced specific grant and it must be used to support the schools budget as defined in The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2025 which cover the financial year 2025-2026. Local authorities are responsible for determining the split of the grant between central expenditure and the individual schools budget (ISB) in conjunction with local schools forums. Local authorities are responsible for allocating the ISB to individual schools in accordance with the local schools' funding formula.

- 35 High needs funding allocations through the DSG cover: allocations of funding to schools and colleges, including place funding which forms part of schools' and colleges delegated annual allocation, and top-up funding; and funding for high needs services delivered directly by the local authority, or under a separate service level agreement with a school or college.
- 36 Any local authority that has an overall deficit on its DSG account at the end of the 2024 to 2025 financial year, or whose DSG surplus has substantially reduced during the year, must co-operate with DfE in handling that situation. This will involve: providing information about its plans for managing its DSG account; providing information about pressures and potential savings on its high needs; and meeting with officials of DfE as and when requested by DfE.
- 37 The operational guidance states that local authorities must ensure that children and young people and their parents/carers are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support, as well as involving them in reviewing and improving local provision, in line with their statutory duties and the SEND code of practice.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 38 There are no financial implications or changes required to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as a result of the recommendations in this report.
- 39 However the proposed development actions contained within our SEND and AP One Plan are intended to support the delivery of our 7-year DSG management plan and its associated financial implications.
- 40 As at 11 November 2024, the DSG management plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 forecasts an unmitigated cumulative DSG deficit of £1.07 billion by the end of 2030/31, reducing to £236.7 million if the plan is implemented successfully.

Policy

- 41 Local authorities are under a duty to ensure sufficiency of school places in their area (section 14 of the Education Act 1996).
- 42 The SEND Code of Practice (January 2015) provides statutory guidance on duties, policies and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and associated regulations and applies to England. The Code of Practice is statutory guidance for many members of the Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership, including the local authority, the health ICB and trusts, and educational settings.
- 43 In March to July 2022, the DfE ran a consultation on their green paper on the future on SEND services entitled: "SEND Review: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time". The Cheshire East 0-25 SEND Partnership response was in support of the proposals and in promptly making those legal requirements which would support the council (and partners) in delivery of the necessary changes.
- 44 Following the green paper consultation, in March 2023 DfE published their SEND and alternative provision improvement plan which set out their plans to change the SEND and alternative provision system in England. The partnership is ensuring we keep up to date with the DfE roadmap and change programme as this is progressed nationally, along with monitoring for any impact on this work arising from the July 2024 change in national government and the ongoing national inquiry on 'Solving the SEND Crisis'.
- 45 The proposed SEND and AP 'One Plan' and the development actions within it contribute specifically to delivery of all elements of Commitment 2 of the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 (as outlined below), and most specifically 2.4:

Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing

2.1 Gap in health equalities is reduced across our diverse borough through a targeted approach

2.2 Improved independence, health and wellbeing through early intervention and prevention

2.3 Everyone feels safe and secure, difference is celebrated, and abuse and exploitation not tolerated

2.4 Children and young people thrive and reach their potential with targeted support when and where they need it

2.5 Communities build their capacity, with support to access information, guidance and funding

2.6 Lasting solutions are delivered through strong and committed partnerships

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 46 The SEND Code of Practice (January 2015) looks to ensure the assessed additional needs of children and young people with SEND are effectively supported to enable them to reach agreed outcomes.
- 47 Our proposed SEND and AP 'One Plan' sets out what we want to achieve as a partnership for children and young people with SEND in Cheshire East; this include details of the key actions we will carry out to achieve our priorities, which are our commitment to ensuring children and young people with SEND have appropriate support to aspire to achieve in line with their peers.

Human Resources

- 48 The vast majority of development actions within our SEND and AP 'One Plan' aim to improve processes, training and guidance to be used by partnership professionals alongside local families. However, full consideration will be given, in line with necessary requirements, to potential human resource implications arising from any individual development action as the actions are planned and delivered.

Risk Management

- 49 Our partnership approach to risk is to operate in a culture of creativity and innovation, in which risks are identified, understood and pro-actively managed, rather than avoided. We recognise that risks are inherent within innovation and are sometimes unavoidable. We are aiming to adopt a structured and coherent approach to identifying, assessing and managing risk to ensure an appropriate level of control in place, without stifling developments. We seek to utilise recognised best practice in the identification and evaluation of risks and opportunities, and to ensure that these are managed to acceptable levels in a proportionate and cost effective way.
- 50 A risk and issue register is already in place for the SEND Partnership and will be maintained throughout the implementation of our SEND and AP 'One Plan' to capture the details of any arising risks and issues, along with all agreed mitigations. All risks are scored using a "4 x 4" scoring methodology, measuring impact and likelihood of the unmitigated and mitigated risk. All risks are identified as either threats (a possible future event or action which could adversely affect our ability to achieve our objectives) or opportunities (an uncertain event or action that could enhance our ability to achieve our objectives) and a decision made on the type of response that is required (avoid, reduce, accept, transfer, exploit etc.). Risk owners and actioners are also identified and recorded.

- 51 The Terms of Reference document for each governance group within the partnership articulates a clear escalation process to ensure risks are proactively considered, managed and escalated where needed, e.g. risks that score highest will be escalated throughout the governance structure and reviewed by the SEND Executive Oversight Panel, while lower-level risks will be considered and managed by the SEND Transformation Action Group.

Rural Communities

- 52 There are no direct implications for rural communities. Children and young people with SEND and their families live and/or access services within all communities in Cheshire East.

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

- 53 The developments captured within our SEND and AP 'One Plan' aim to improve the experiences and outcomes of all Cheshire East children and young people with SEND. This report seeks approval for this plan.
- 54 As outlined in section 4 of our plan, all members of the Cheshire East SEND Partnership have a shared, co-produced commitment in wanting all our children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities to be **HAPI**:
- **H**appy and healthy
 - **A**chieving their potential
 - **P**art of their communities
 - **I**ndependent as possible, making choices about their future

Public Health

- 55 It is intended that the developments detailed in our SEND and AP One Plan will contribute positively towards the health and wellbeing of Cheshire East residents (most specifically, children and young people with SEND and their families).
- 56 Health and Wellbeing Boards have a duty to produce a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for their area. The "*Statutory Guidance on Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies*" published by the Department of Health in March 2013 outlines the required scope of JSNAs: to identify health and social care needs that can be met or affected by the local authority (Cheshire East Council) in collaboration with the NHS.
- 57 An updated and comprehensive JSNA for children and young people with SEND has been developed alongside the production of our 'One Plan'

document. Each themed JSNA reviews the health and social care needs of our population, and our SEND JSNA provides detailed information on local needs, available support and potential barriers to support, summarised in a series of recommendations: all of which have helped to shape the priorities and actions in our SEND and AP 'One Plan'.

Climate Change

- 58 Many Cheshire East pupils with SEND are educated out of the borough at high costs and with long travel journeys. Improvements around sufficiency of educational placements will aim to reduce travel for our pupils and increase the number of pupils that are able to access education within their local community.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Sal Khan	S151 Officer	19/05/25	23/05/25
Janet Witkowski	Acting Monitoring Officer	19/05/25	25/05/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Diane Green / Kathy Oliver	Finance Manager (Children's Services) / Principal Accountant (Lead Business Partner)	01/05/25	14/05/25
Roisin Beressi	Principal Lawyer (Adults and Education)	01/05/25	13/05/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>			

Claire Williamson	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration	23/05/25	28/05/25
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Access to Information

Contact Officer:	<p>Claire Williamson</p> <p>Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration</p> <p>Claire.williamson@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p>
Appendices:	<p>Appendix 1. Cheshire East SEND and AP One Plan 2025-2028 DRAFT v0.15 May 2025</p>
Background Papers:	<p>Report to Children and Families Committee re: Update on the progress of the key areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 - Financial Reporting 3 2024/2025 (13 January 2025)</p> <p>Report to Children and Families Committee re: SEND Partnership Strategy and Governance (16 September 2024)</p> <p>National SEND and alternative provision improvement plan (March 2023)</p> <p>National 'Solving the SEND Crisis' Inquiry (Ongoing)</p>