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## **Children and Families Committee**

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**Date of Meeting:** 8 November 2021

**Report Title:** SEND Strategy

**Report of:** Jacky Forster, Director of Education and Skills

**Report Reference No:** CF/09/21-22

**Ward(s) Affected:** All

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### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1.** This report sets out the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 1 September 2021 – 31 August 2024 and the consultation and engagement that has occurred to compile the SEND Strategy and associated action plan.
- 1.2.** The SEND Strategy has been drafted with clear sight on the Council's aim to be open and fair. We have worked transparently with our residents and partners to deliver our SEND vision and ambitions across Cheshire East. The SEND Strategy aims to reduce inequalities, promote fairness and opportunity for all our children and young people with SEND and their families.
- 1.3.** The SEND Strategy is a key driver in the Council's priority to empower and care about people, with a focus on:
  - Working together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient
  - Reducing health inequalities across the borough
  - Supporting all children to have the best start in life
  - Increasing opportunities for all children and young adults with additional needs
  - Ensuring all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1.** That the Children and Families Committee approve the SEND Strategy and associated action plan for 2021 – 2024.
- 2.2.** That the Children and Families Committee receive an annual report on the progress being made against the vision, values and actions contained in the SEND Strategy.

## **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1.** The two recommendations detailed within this report will ensure that the Children and Families Committee agree the SEND Strategy for the next three years and have oversight of its delivery.

## **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1.** This section is not applicable.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1.** Our vision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is the same as for all children and young people - that they achieve well in all aspects of their lives and are happy, fulfilled and play an active role in their communities. For children and young people and their parents and carers, this means that their experiences will be of a system which is supportive of everyone and we ensure our resources and energy are applied efficiently. Their special educational needs and disabilities will be picked up at the earliest point with support routinely put in place quickly, and their parents and carers will know what services they can reasonably expect to be provided. Children and young people and their parents and carers will be fully involved in decisions about their support and what they want to achieve.
- 5.2.** We have drafted a SEND Strategy (see attached Appendix 1) as we come out of unprecedented times due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Children with disabilities and their families/ parent carers in particular have experienced significant pressures from the impact of COVID on them and their support services. There are significant pressures on resources across the SEND system (including a high needs funding block under extreme pressure) and children and young people and their parents/ carers expectations quite rightly remain high. This strategy will support us to ensure that we are well placed to meet this changing landscape.
- 5.3.** Due to the energy, commitment and dedication of all parties involved in this work, we have already moved a long way towards achieving our aims, but we still have more to do to ensure that children and young people achieve their best possible outcomes. Our SEND revisit in May 2021 by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission scrutinised whether we had made sufficient progress in addressing two areas of significant weaknesses identified at a previous inspection in 2018, which were:

- the timeliness, process and quality of education, health and care (EHC) plans; and
  - establishing an effective autism spectrum disorder (ASD) pathway and in reducing waiting times.
- 5.4.** Inspectors found that, since their last visit, the timeliness, process and quality of EHC plans have been transformed, saying that by early 2020, almost every needs assessment was completed within the 20-week deadline, compared to less than one in six in 2018.
- 5.5.** Regarding support for children and young people with autism, inspectors found that more children are starting nursery and school with their needs understood and met. Families have also been offered support and training, so they can better understand and support their child. In terms of waiting times, in 2018 more than 200 children and young people were waiting more than 12 weeks for their first assessment, but by March 2020, this had reduced to two weeks.
- 5.6.** The improvements identified in our revisit and the feedback from inspectors to improve our communication with parents and carers surrounding our improvement journey is captured within this strategy. This will be monitored and scrutinised on a bi-monthly basis by the 0-25 SEND Partnership Board to ensure we achieve what we have set out in this strategy. Our Communications and Engagement strategy is also being updated to reflect the need to be a listening and proactive partnership.
- 5.7.** It is important that the delivery of the priority actions from the previous SEND Strategy, and the momentum that has been achieved, is not lost as we move to a new SEND Strategy. A significant amount of improvement has been achieved over the last three years and as you would expect across SEND, many of the improvements require further ongoing attention to ensure they are fully embedded and monitored to ensure their positive impact is a reality for children, young people and their families. The SEND Partnership Board structures will continue to focus on the following areas:
- Improving the quality of EHC Plans. Ensure a clear focus on SEND outcomes, and on what impact support is having for children and young people and how this is supporting them to achieve their aspirations.
  - Sufficiency of local, good quality SEN school places.
  - Improvements in the timeliness and transparency of the autism assessment pathways from referral, first appointment, assessment to receiving an outcome. Ensuring a continued focus on the support provided pre and post diagnosis.
  - Ensuring co-production is at the heart of all we do.
- 5.8.** Taking account of the continued work described above, and the detailed actions contained in our all-age strategies for Autism, Mental Health and Learning Disability, the priorities for 2021 – 2024 have been split into

three years to ensure that the workload is spread and everyone driving the improvements is clear on achieving positive impact for children and young people.

The following five areas will be our main focus for action over the next three years:

1. Improving Communication and coproduction with families
2. Access to Provision and Support
3. Improve timeliness and quality of Annual Reviews of Education Health and Care Plans
4. Effective and Supported Workforce
5. COVID-19 Recovery.

**5.9.** This report ensures that the Children and Families Committee agree the SEND Strategy for the next three years and have oversight of its delivery. An annual report on the progress being made against the vision, values and actions contained in the SEND Strategy will be presented to Children and Families Committee.

**5.10.** It is important to recognise everyone who has made, and is continuing to make, this Strategy a reality, including:

- All the children, young people, parents and carers who gave their time and energy, and honestly told us how it is
- Our Education professionals, including SEND and specialist support teams, and staff within educational settings
- Early Help and Social Care professionals in Children's and Adults' Services
- Health professionals within the Clinical Commissioning Group and provider services
- All members of the 0-25 SEND Partnership Board and workstreams.
- A special thanks to the Cheshire East Parent Carer Forum for their engagement and detailed feedback on the drafting of the strategy.

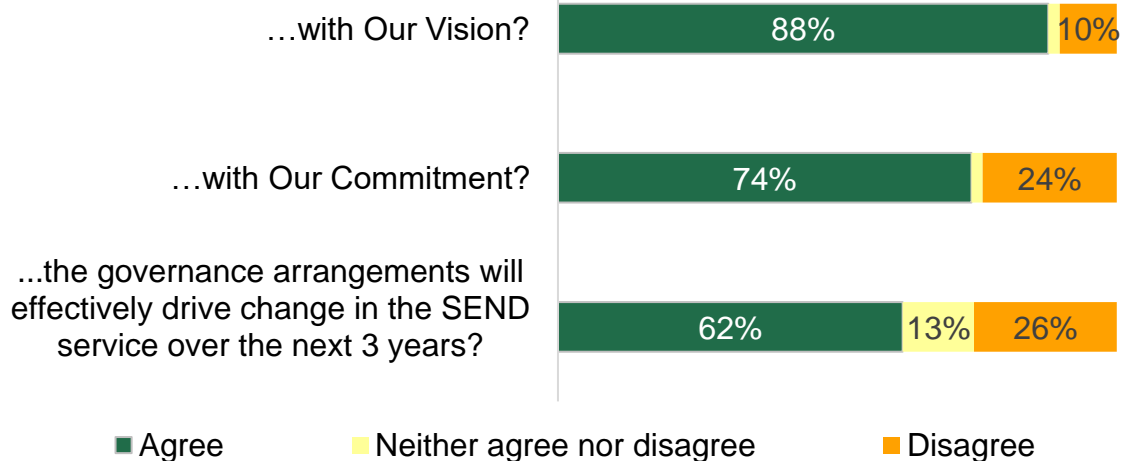
## **6. Consultation and Engagement**

**6.1.** This SEND Strategy has been written after engagement sessions with the SEND Partnership Board, parent / carers, multi-agency partners, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) during the period March through to July 2021 and also by listening to children and young people through completion of their individual SEND Passports. The engagement sessions have been supplemented with email correspondence from across partners and in particular a detailed response from the Cheshire East Parent Carer Forum.

**6.2.** To support the extensive informal consultation undertaken to develop this SEND Strategy, during September and October 2021 a formal

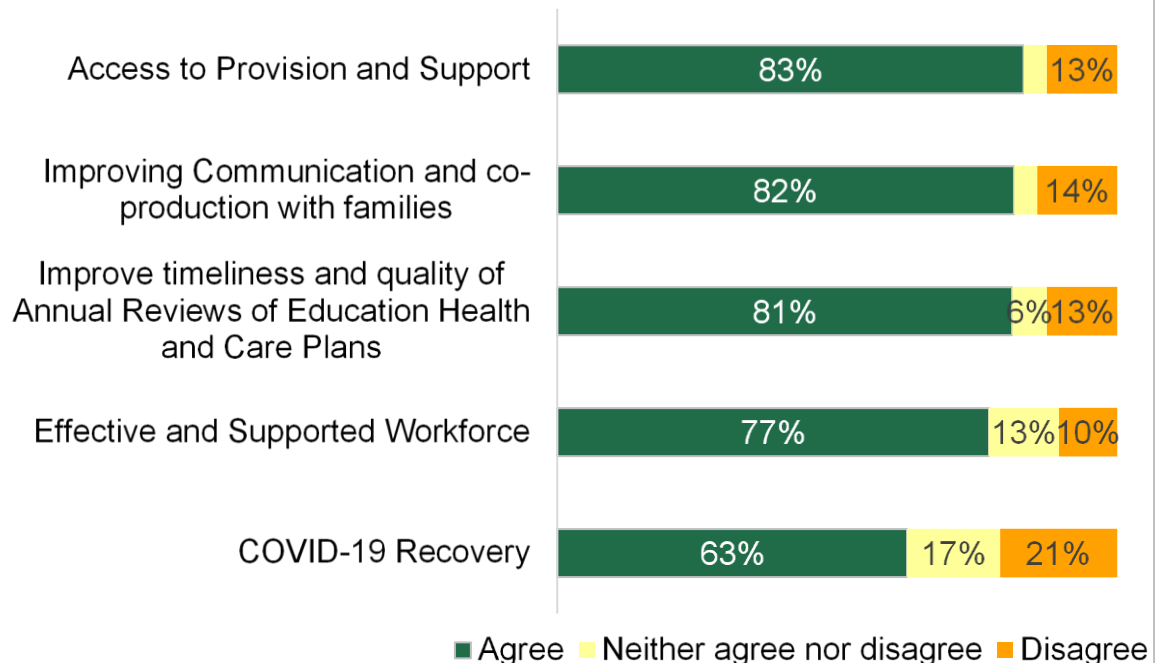
consultation with SEND partners was undertaken. A total of 51 respondents, ranging from parent carers to professionals took the further opportunity to contribute to the Strategy. It is extremely positive to see that very large proportions of consultation respondents gave support for the Strategy:

How strongly do you agree or disagree...



Number of responses between 47 and 50

How strongly do you agree or disagree that the following priority actions are the right ones to include in the strategy?



Number of responses between 49 and 49

- 6.3.** While the survey has provided us with confirmation that the Strategy is a good base from which to make improvements, there are a number of people who took the opportunity to highlight their lived experiences, and the day-to-day frustrations they are having to deal with when supporting children with SEND. This strengthens the need to make positive change, as defined within the SEND Strategy.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1. Legal**

- 7.1.1.** There are no legal implications to this report.

### **7.2. Finance**

- 7.2.1.** Due to extreme pressure on the High Needs funding block as set out in the High Needs recovery plan, this strategy will help to strengthen CEC's response to mitigate these financial pressures, specifically linked to EHCPs.
- 7.2.2.** Improving the quality of EHCPs by ensuring a clear focus and regular ongoing reviews will allow CEC to achieve value for money (VfM) whilst also achieving the best outcomes for the child.

### **7.3. Policy**

- 7.3.1.** There are no policy implications to this report.

### **7.4. Equality**

- 7.4.1.** An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed to support the SEND Strategy and is attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

### **7.5. Human Resources**

- 7.5.1.** Adequate resource needs to be in place to ensure that the SEND Strategy's objectives are met.

### **7.6. Risk Management**

- 7.6.1.** The main risk to the SEND Strategy is the non-achievement of the priority actions detailed within the strategy. The SEND Partnership Board will provide oversight and challenge to the delivery of the SEND Strategy and an annual report detailing the progress being made against the vision, values and actions contained in the SEND Strategy will be presented to Children and Families Committee.

### **7.7. Rural Communities**

- 7.7.1.** The SEND Strategy covers the sufficiency of provision for children and young people with SEND as we want to ensure that children and young people can attend education and receive support close to their homes.

## **7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

- 7.8.1.** The SEND Strategy provides the platform for the SEND Partnership and all relevant organisations in Cheshire East to come together to commit to provide the best quality education and support for children and young people.

We want 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.

## **7.9. Public Health**

- 7.9.1.** One element of the vision contained in the SEND Strategy is to ensure our children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities are happy and healthy. There are a range of priorities within the strategy that focus on mental health and wellbeing and effective access to health services.

## **7.10. Climate Change**

- 7.10.1.** There are no direct climate change implications to this report, however the planned improvement to the sufficiency of good quality, local SEN school places will ensure that the long travel times to alternative school placements outside of Cheshire East are reduced.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Dave Leadbetter – Head of Children’s Commissioning dave.leadbetter@cheshireeast.gov.uk 07794 059581
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Draft SEND Strategy 2021 – 2024 Appendix 2 – Equality Impact assessment
Background Papers:	None