

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Community and Children’s Services – for decision Health and Wellbeing Board – for information	Dated: 16/01/2025 07/02/2025
Subject: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision Strategy 2025-29	Public report: For Decision
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes 	Diverse engaged communities Providing excellent services
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of:	Judith Findlay, Executive Director of Community and Children’s Services
Report author:	Hannah Dobbin, Strategy and Projects Officer

Summary

This report presents to Members the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision Strategy 2025-29 for their approval. The strategy sets out the strategic priorities for the Local Area Partnership, which brings together Education, Health and Social Care representatives with the City Parent Carer Forum and young people with disabilities. The strategy also guides our activities in relation to children and young people with disabilities aged 0-25 and their families who live in the City of London.

The SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 2025-29 was developed with parent carers, children and young people with disabilities, and professionals across Education, Health and Social Care. An ‘easy read’ version has been produced to widen accessibility of the strategy. An overview action plan has been developed that will sit beneath the strategy, along with a ‘you said, we did’ document that sets out what the Local Area Partnership has done in response to ideas and feedback from children, young people and parent carers.

This paper summarises the strategy for Members' approval.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- approve the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 2025-29

Main Report

Background

1. The SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 2025-29 (Appendix 1) is a statutory document and replaces the SEND Strategy 2020-24. Alternative provision (places that provide education for children and young people who cannot go to school) has been added to the remit of the strategy to reflect a shift in national Government policy.
2. An 'easy read' version of the strategy has been consulted on and produced (Appendix 2).
3. The development of the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy involved engagement activities and evidence gathering including two facilitated workshops with 30 professionals and two parent carers, plus a session with the City Parent Carer Forum. A facilitated arts session enabled children and young people with disabilities to share their experiences and views. A public consultation on the draft strategy and easy read version ran between July and September 2024. A summary of engagement and consultation activities is provided in Appendix 3.
4. The strategy was also informed by data and evidence, including the Public Health team's SEND Health Needs Assessment.
5. A parent carer Reference Group formed part of the oversight and governance process during the development of the strategy. Five parent carers representing a range of needs and experiences met three times during the development of the strategy. This provided invaluable oversight and input; influencing the type of involvement activities delivered as well as the narrative and content of the strategy and action plan. Learning from this new approach has been shared internally.
6. A 'you said, we did' document summarises the Local Area Partnership's responses to feedback from parent carers (Appendix 4).

Current Position

7. The SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy sets out principles of how the Local Area Partnership will work together to deliver the priorities set out in the strategy. The principles are:
 - High ambition - support and helpfully challenge each other to achieve the best possible outcomes for all children and young people accessing alternative provision and/or with SEND and their families.
 - Trust and honesty - deepen trust between all partners, including families, by being open and honest about our priorities, challenges and what we can achieve.
 - Mutual respect and acceptance - value each other's experiences and expertise, including those of families.
 - Partnership and transparency - create positive, transparent partnerships that keep children and young people with SEND and/or accessing alternative provision and their families at the centre of all we do.
 - Co-design and engagement - co-design and engage with children and young people with SEND and their families from the start and provide feedback along the way.
 - Inclusive communities - support communities that are inclusive of all.
8. Government statistics highlight the national trend that the number of Education Health and Care Plans has increased each year since their introduction in 2014. Research evidence highlights the experiences of families with children with disabilities which can involve fighting to access support they are entitled to and dealing with the emotional toll that comes if they do not receive that support.
9. The engagement and consultation activities provided the Local Area Partnership with valuable insight into the lives of children and young people with SEND and their families and what is important to them. These experiences and views informed the development of the strategy and are reflected in the narrative, priorities, case studies, quotes and artwork.
10. Children and young people with disabilities shared their experiences of living in the City of London and how it can be hard to find accessible places and activities. Parent carers shared their experiences of trying to navigate a complex system to get their child the right help at the right time. Parent carers also highlighted their own emotional wellbeing needs, and stated that support for the whole family during transition points is key, such as moving between school years or from children's to adult services. Parent carers want the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy to be a lever for positive change, not only within the SEND system, but also across the City of London.

11. The insight gathered informed the five strategic priorities in the strategy. The order does not relate to importance; they all contribute to our shared vision for children and young people. The priorities are:

- Children and young people with SEND and their families get the right help, at the right time.
- Children and young people with SEND and parent carers are supported during transitions, including preparation for adulthood.
- Children and young people with SEND and their families are supported and enabled by a skilled, valued workforce.
- Children and young people with SEND and their families feel recognised, valued and part of their local community.
- Children and young people experience high quality, appropriate alternative provision when needed.

12. The strategy includes key actions for the Local Area Partnership under each of the priorities. An action plan (Appendix 5) sits below the strategy providing more detail to the strategy's priorities and actions, including outcomes.

13. The action plan will be delivered by members of the Local Area Partnership and formally reviewed annually by the SEND Programme Board which drives the Local Area Partnership. Parent carers and children and young people with SEND will also be invited to be part of the review process.

Key Data

14. The SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy cites various data sources to provide a snapshot of children and young people with SEND in England and the City of London.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications – the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy aligns with the Corporate Plan 2024-2029 objectives of 'providing excellent services' and 'diverse engaged communities'. It also aligns with aims of the Department for Community and Children's Services Business Plan: safe; potential; independence, involvement and choice; health and wellbeing; and community. The alternative provision element relates to the City Corporation's Alternative Provision Statement. The strategy sits alongside other City Corporation strategies including those for Early Help, Carers, Education, and the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It also sits alongside the City and Hackney All Age Autism Strategy 2022-25 and City and Hackney Strategy for Learning Disabled People 2019-24 (to be reviewed in 2025). SEND is one area prioritised by the Association of London Directors of Children's Services, which the City Corporation is represented on. The strategy sits within the context of national Government policy and legislation.

Financial implications – the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy sets out a range of priorities and actions. Financial implications will be considered within each discrete project or any support or services commissioned as part of the strategy. It is also important to recognise that nationally there is increased pressure on High Needs Funding for SEND but as it stands the City Corporation can meet residents' needs within our budgets. The

pressures on the City Corporation will likely increase in 12-18 months based on current needs trajectories. Impact and risks around this be monitored and mitigated against. The City Corporation joins local authorities across the country in advocating for more sustained national funding based on current legislation.

Resource implications – members of the Local Area Partnership have jointly developed and agreed the strategy and the action plan. Discrete projects or actions within the strategy may require additional resource consideration and this will be dealt with on an individual basis.

Legal implications – the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy sits within the context of SEND legislation and statutory guidance.

Risk implications - the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy brings no major risks to the City Corporation or Local Area Partnership. Risk analysis will be completed for each discrete project that comes from the strategy as appropriate.

Equalities implications – an Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Strategy (Appendix 6).

Climate implications – none.

Security implications – none.

Conclusion

15. The proposed SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy provides the Local Area Partnership with a shared vision and actions to deliver positive change for children and young people with SEND and their families in the City of London.
16. The engagement with children and young people with SEND and parent carers that has informed the strategy provides a strong basis to ensure that the focus is on understanding and meeting their needs. The strategy is also an opportunity to increase understanding of SEND across the City of London and create local communities where children and young people with SEND and their families feel recognised, valued and included.
17. The Local Area Partnership is committed to continuing to engage children and young people with SEND and their families, throughout the lifetime of the strategy as part of delivering actions within the strategy, but also as part of holding the Local Area Partnership to account.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 2025-29
- Appendix 2 - SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 'easy read'
- Appendix 3 – Engagement and consultation summary
- Appendix 4 – 'You said, we did'
- Appendix 5 – Action plan
- Appendix 6 – Equality Impact Assessment

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