

Brighton & Hove City Council

Children, Families & Schools Committee

Agenda Item 18(c)

Subject: Deputations

Date of meeting: 11 September 2023

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting of the Council for the hearing of deputations from members of the public.

The spokesperson is entitled to speak for 5 minutes.

1. Alternative Provision for children in Brighton & Hove with SEN

Introduction

We, as concerned parents, come before you today as advocates for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) whose educational and well-being requirements are not being adequately met by the Local Authority (LA).

A lack of adequate full-time Alternative Provision (AP) offered to children in Brighton & Hove with SEN has given rise to a disturbing situation whereby these children are persistently absent from education and are then exposed to child criminal exploitation (CCE) in the community. Some children are being offered a part-time package with a mixed education approach e.g. 121 tutoring, which is not sufficient to prevent the risk of negative behaviours in the community and CCE.

There is little aspiration for our children, and their future feels uncertain.

The purpose of the deputation

Brighton & Hove LA carries a significant responsibility under the law to safeguard children with SEN, particularly those who may be susceptible to criminal exploitation. Sections 17 and 47 of the Children Act unequivocally outline these obligations, emphasising the local authority's duty to ensure the protection and well-being of these vulnerable individuals.

Drawing from the recently conducted Ofsted Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) inspection of the Brighton & Hove Local Area Partnership (*Ref 1.*), we come before you with a clear and succinct purpose: **to request the local authority's commitment to fulfilling their legal obligations and to act upon the recommendations made in the recent SEND OFSTED report.**

Central points & requests

We seek support to resolve the areas below:

We are requesting evidence regarding the plans **to increase the availability and quality of special school places to cater to the growing number of children and young people with Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plans,**

particularly those diagnosed with ADHD and those experiencing social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) concerns. The suitability of some of the AP offered e.g. Russell Martin Foundation, is continually failing these SEN children.

Whilst we wait for new AP provision, we have an **urgent issue to address around waiting times that some young people experience while seeking a placement in a specialist school**. This must be addressed. We understand that an AP working group has been established within the council, but we understand there is no parental representation at this group.

The OFSTED report on Brighton & Hove SEND provision stated *“the establishment of a new position dedicated to coordinating the commissioning of alternative provision and ensuring its quality is a positive step forward. It is suggested that the pace of change is not yet meeting the desired speed”*. **We request support to ensure that this newly established role is put in place.**

In conclusion

In conclusion, the situation we face demands immediate action. We must come together as a community to address the issues around suitable educational support for these vulnerable children. By allocating the necessary resources, implementing effective alternative provision and targeted programs for children with SEN and SEMH needs, and implementing comprehensive safeguarding measures, we can offer these children a chance to engage productively with education, and build a better future for themselves.

Supported by:

Aideen Smith-Watson (spokesperson)
Zoe Mendelson
Karen Smith-Watson
Caroline Davies
Innes Bailey

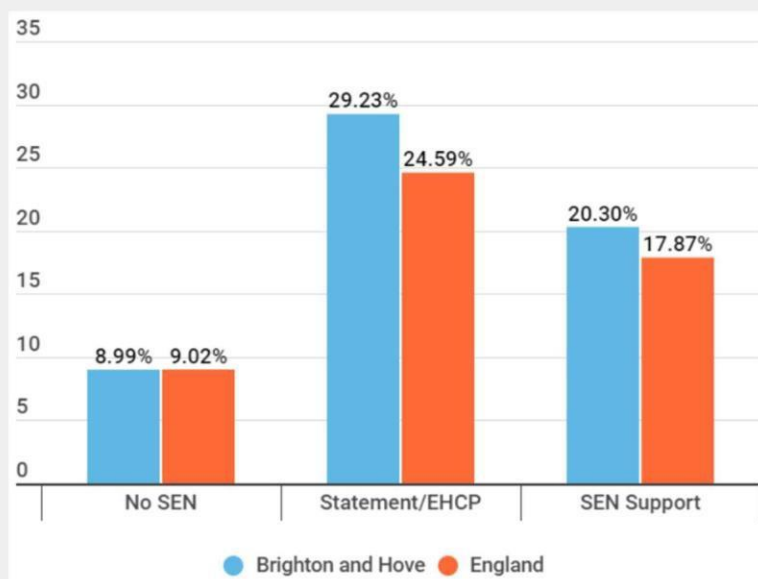
Supplementary information

Send overview in Brighton & Hove

The data below is taken from the published report Brighton & Hove Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy (2021 – 2026). (Ref 2.)

- Overall rates of absence for children and young people in Brighton & Hove with SEN are higher compared to the England average.
- In addition, overall rates of persistent absence for children and young people with an education, health and care (EHC) Plan are higher compared to England average.
- Rates of fixed term exclusions for children and young people with SEN are higher compared to the England average.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs defined as persistent absentees 2018/19



Child criminal exploitation (CCE) in Brighton & Hove

Exclusion is widely regarded by child protection experts as a trigger point for criminal exploitation as pupils removed from classrooms lose the structure of the school day and the oversight of teachers. Some are left unsupervised at home and others are sent to pupil referral units, where OCGs often recruit. CCE has found fertile ground in Brighton & Hove, turning the lives of these children and families into a nightmare. The absence of proper educational opportunities, coupled with insufficient daytime supervision, has left them vulnerable to the manipulative tactics of exploiters who seek to exploit their innocence for criminal gain. These children are trapped in a cycle of exploitation that hampers their development and endangers their future prospects.

The Home Office serious and organised crime strategy 2018 pointed to a rise in the threat from low volume, but high impact, crimes. 'County Lines' which has been exploiting vulnerable people to supply the drugs market is a local as well as a national example. A need to tackle serious violence and knife crime has been identified as a priority by national government and Sussex was one of 18 areas to receive funding to work to tackle the issue in 2019/20.

Safeguarding & support deficiencies

The heart of the issue lies not only in the prevalence of child criminal exploitation but also in the lack of adequate safeguarding measures and educational support for these vulnerable children. The absence of a strong educational foundation and the neglect of their special educational needs leaves them in a state of limbo, devoid of the necessary support systems that could empower them to overcome their disabilities. This lack of intervention perpetuates their vulnerability to exploitation and impedes their chances of leading productive

lives.

Government Education Committee evidence

We would draw your attention to **key recommendations and conclusions** published in a report by the House of Commons Education Committee in July 2018: **Forgotten children: alternative provision and the scandal of ever increasing exclusions (Ref. 3)**

14. There is an inexplicable lack of central accountability and direction. No one appears to be aware of all the provision that is available, which impacts on both schools, local authorities and parents. Unless all providers are required to notify the local authority of their presence, not all schools or LAs will be able to make informed decisions about placements. Without someone to take responsibility for co-ordinating and publishing information about the local provision that is available, parents and pupils will remain unable to fully participate in discussions about alternative provisions referrals. (Paragraph 56)

23. There should be greater oversight of exclusions and the commissioning of alternative provision for all pupils by the local authority. These children need a champion, and schools need both challenge and support. (Paragraph 76)

24. There should be a senior person in each local authority who is responsible for protecting the interests and promoting the educational achievement of pupils in alternative provision, which is adequately resourced. This role and post-holder should be different from that of the Virtual School Head for Looked-After Children. (Paragraph 77)

Ambition & positive opportunity for change

Despite the dire circumstances, we have an opportunity to effect positive change. By recognizing the unique needs of children with ADHD and SEMH and tailoring our educational and safeguarding efforts accordingly, we can break the exploitative cycle.

For reference, we cite AP excellence provided by the AP Haringey Learning Partnership <https://www.haringeylearningpartnership.org/> dedicated to finding increasingly effective ways to support, motivate, and inspire students who have experienced disruptions in their previous school placements. A skilled team provides a holistic approach offering the necessary emotional and educational support to help address their unique needs and overcome barriers.

Cited documentation & key references:

Ref 1. OFSTED Report on Brighton & Hove SEND Provision

Ref 2. Brighton & Hove Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy (2021 – 2026)

Ref 3. [House of Commons Education Report on Forgotten children: alternative provision and the scandal of ever-increasing exclusions](#)