

Brighton & Hove City Council

Leader of the Council

Subject: Local SEND Reform Plan: Brighton & Hove improving support for children and young people with SEND from birth to age 25

Date of Decision : 17 June 2026

Report of: Cabinet Member Children, Families & Youth

Lead Officer: Corporate Director Families & Wellbeing

Contact Officer: Name: Georgina Clarke-Green

Email: Georgina.ClarkeGreen@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

Key Decision: Yes

Reason(s) Key: Expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the expenditure of the City Council's budget, namely above £1,000,000 and is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral divisions (wards).

For general release

Note: Reasons for urgency

Due to the special circumstances outlined below, and in accordance with Regulation 10 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, compliance with the requirement to provide 28 days' notice has not been possible. The urgency of the matter has been agreed upon by the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny and it is deemed necessary to consider this item without delay, due to Statutory DfE deadline: Submission of the Local SEND Reform Plan (Annex A) is required by 19 June 2026; the next scheduled Cabinet meeting is 25 June 2026, which is beyond the deadline and would result in non-compliance if approval is delayed.

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report sets out the *Brighton & Hove's Local SEND Reform Plan: Brighton & Hove improving support for children and young people with SEND from birth to age 25* for approval, submission and implementation.
- 1.2 The Local SEND Reform Plan supports delivery of the Council Plan 2023 to 2027 outcomes: an inclusive and fairer city, a better future for children and young people, and a responsive and learning Council with well-run services.
- 1.3 The plan is a Local Area plan and requires formal sign-off from both Brighton & Hove City Council and NHS Surrey and Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Council agrees to *Brighton & Hove's Local SEND Reform Plan: Brighton & Hove improving support for children and young people with SEND from birth to age 25 (Annex A)*, as set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The Council agrees to the submission of the Local SEND Reform Plan to the Department for Education (DfE) within the required national timeframe (19th June 2026).
- 2.3 The Council delegates authority to the Corporate Director for Families, Children and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Children, Families & Youth to make final amendments required by the DfE prior to submission, provided these do not materially alter the strategic direction set out in the Plan.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The Department for Education (DfE) asked local areas to produce a SEND Reform Plan setting out how they will deliver the national vision for a more inclusive, early intervention–focused system. This includes clearly describing current strengths, gaps, and priorities, alongside a costed, multi-year plan demonstrating how reforms will improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- 3.2 The SEND Reform Plan is also intended to provide assurance on delivery, requiring local authorities and partners to evidence strong governance, co-production, and measurable impact through defined milestones, KPIs, and sustainable use of funding.
- 3.3 The Brighton & Hove Local SEND Reform Plan sets out an ambitious and positive vision for children and young people with SEND, centered on improving outcomes, experiences and life chances.
- 3.4 At its core, the Local SEND Reform Plan is about ensuring children and young people get the right support, at the right time, in the right place. It focuses on reducing barriers to learning, participation and inclusion through earlier identification, a stronger universal offer, timely access to specialist expertise through Experts at Hand, and more specialist/support bases within mainstream settings. Together, these changes aim to help more children and young people thrive in their local communities, build independence and achieve their full potential.
- 3.5 The plan is built around four core aims:
 - stronger inclusion and earlier support in mainstream settings
 - improved workforce capacity and capability
 - greater confidence among families, children and partners
 - better financial sustainability and value for money.
- 3.6 The Local SEND Reform Plan also aims to create a more joined-up, responsive and sustainable SEND system across education, health and

care. Through investment in workforce capacity via Experts at Hand, greater sufficiency in placements and provision, stronger co-production with families and young people, and closer partnership working, the Plan seeks to improve consistency, reduce waiting times, and ensure support is shaped around individual needs rather than processes.

- 3.7 Ultimately, this ambition is about delivering a system that is more inclusive, equitable and outcomes focused. One that prepares children and young people with SEND for adulthood, employment, and active participation in their communities, while giving families confidence that they will receive the support they need.
- 3.8 The Local SEND Reform Plan has been discussed, agreed and will be signed off by the following (see table below).

Role	Name
Leader of BHCC	Councillor Bella Sankey
BHCC Chief Executive	Jess Gibbons
Corporate Director, Families Children & Wellbeing	Deb Austin
Local Authority Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer)	Elizabeth Griffiths
BHCC Director of Education & Learning (SRO)	Georgina Clarke-Green
NHS Surrey & Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB) CEO	Karen McDowell
Chief Commissioning Officer, Neighbour Health & Partnerships (as ICB Place Director) *	Amy Galea
Chair of SEND & AP Partnership Board (Includes parent/carer representatives, early years, school, college and other partners).	Georgina Clarke-Green

*Note. The ICB is currently restructuring, and Directors with a focus on place will be appointed once all posts are filled within the Chief Commissioning Officer, Neighbourhood Health and Partnerships Directorate senior structure.

- 3.9 The Local Area partnership has agreed Georgina Clarke-Green, BHCC Director of Education & Learning, as the named Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) for the Local SEND Reform Plan and Local Area transformation, who will be responsible for overseeing SEND improvement and reform for the area.
- 3.10 The Statutory DfE deadline for submission of the Local SEND Reform Plan (Annex A) is required by 19 June 2026.
- 3.11 Failure to submit by the deadline risks loss or delay of funding, with direct impact on delivery of SEND reform priorities in 2026–27.
- 3.12 Failure to submit by the DfE deadline would position the local area as non-compliant with national reform expectations, potentially impacting future assurance, funding confidence and external scrutiny.

- 3.13 The aim through implementation of the plan is to ensure co-production with children, young people and families and reflects a shared ambition to create inclusive communities where all children and young people can feel safe, supported and able to achieve their potential, while ensuring services are sustainable, responsive and continuously improving.
- 3.14 Programme and workforce mobilisation dependency. Delays would impact system capacity, early intervention delivery and statutory demand pressures.
- 3.15 Recruitment and deployment of additional workforce capacity (for example, Educational Psychologists, Speech & Language Therapists, Occupational Therapist and delivery infrastructure) are contingent on approved funding and plan submission.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 There is no alternative option – there is a requirement from the DfE to submit a Local SEND Reform Plan by 19 June 2026 in order to secure central government funding going forward.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 Completion of the Local SEND Reform Plan has been led by the Council, with extensive input from a wide range of stakeholders, including NHS Surrey & Sussex; schools and education partners; and parent/carer representatives ensuring it reflects a collaborative and system-wide approach.
- 5.2 The next phase of the SEND Reform Plan will focus on iterative development and strengthening through continued co-production and testing. This will include:
- Deepening co-production with children and young people, parent carers, and partners (education, health, and social care) to refine priorities, test proposals, and ensure solutions are practical and responsive to lived experience.
 - Further development of implementation detail, including clearer delivery pathways, workforce models, and locality-based approaches (for example, Experts at Hand).
 - Strengthening governance and accountability, ensuring regular multi-agency oversight, transparent reporting, and alignment with wider council and NHS priorities.
 - Embedding data and impact measures, with a shared dashboard to track progress against KPIs, outcomes, and value for money.

- Ongoing engagement with stakeholders, including schools, SENCOs, and post-16 providers, to support system readiness and collective ownership of delivery.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 In line with the government's SEND reform plans, the council is planning to significantly increase investment in expanding local mainstream provision.
- 6.2 There are time-limited funding conditions. Key elements of the funding (including Section 14 grant) are time-bound to 31 March 2027, requiring immediate mobilisation and implementation.
- 6.3 The planned new early intervention and inclusion focused provision will take effect over a multi-year period and the estimated annual revenue costs once all new provision in place is estimated at £3.483m and will be a cost to the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. For context, the 2026/27 High Needs Block allocation made to Brighton and Hove by government is £43.481m.
- 6.4 Future projections show that the High Needs Block will move into a significant deficit position in 2026/27 (c. £7m in-year deficit) and 2027/28 (c. £11m in-year deficit). In the longer term, the investment in early intervention and mainstream inclusion is expected to reduce the need for more expensive high-cost placements which will mitigate the impact of the planned investment and reduce the size of the deficits.
- 6.5 In February 2026 the Government announced that as part of the wider SEND system reform they will introduce a High Needs Stability Grant in 2026/27. This grant, subject to compliance with certain conditions, is expected to mean that 90% of the council's cumulative high needs deficit as at 31/03/2026 will be funded by government. The deficit in Brighton and Hove at the end of the 2025/26 financial year was £1.762m. Allocations of the High Needs Stability Grant will only be paid once a local authority has developed and submitted to the Department for Education, a Local SEND reform plan which is then approved as meeting the required criteria. At this stage it is not clear what arrangements Government will put in place for central DSG deficits (primarily high needs related) arising in 2026/27 and 2027/28 but, from 2028/29, assuming compliance with the SEND reforms, the expectation is that any deficits will be managed by central Government.
- 6.6 The receipt of the Experts at Hand and transformation grant funding (estimated at £1.75m in 2026/27 and anticipated at similar levels in 2027/28 and 2028/29) is also contingent on the submission of a compliant SEND Reform Plan.
- 6.7 In terms of capital expenditure, it is forecast that spending to support the SEND reform programme will total approximately £8.3m between 2026/27 and 2028/29. This will be funded from the £3.7 billion national investment that government is making to facilitate the creation of new special school

places and inclusion bases. The Council is expected to set out a clear local strategy in order to access funding.

Name of finance officer consulted: Steve Williams

Date consulted : 12/06/2026

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The Council has statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014 in relation to children and young people with SEND. The proposals support the discharge of those duties.
- 7.2 Submission of the Local SEND Reform Plan is required by the Department for Education. Failure to submit a compliant plan by the deadline i.e. 19th June 2026 will result in loss or delay of the High Needs Stability Grant payments to write off deficits funding and increased central government scrutiny.
- 7.3 The Plan must adhere to strict content frameworks, structural requirements and co-design standard set by the DfE. The DfE has stated that the Plan is intended for strategic development rather than granular spending breakdowns. The content of the report must include information dictated by the DfE's Experts at Hand Grant Conditions.
- 7.4 The Council is required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and in particular must have 'due regard' to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty ('**PSED**')) in finalising the Plan. This should continue to be monitored as the plan is developed. The PSED mandates that the Council must consciously consider the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. The LA's consideration of its equality duties is summarised with the EIA template and body of the report and the Plan. The level of "due regard" considered sufficient in any particular context depends on the facts. The duty should always be applied in a proportionate way depending on the circumstances of the case and the seriousness of the potential equality impacts on those with protected characteristics.

Name of lawyer consulted: Sandra O'brien

Date consulted (12/06/26)

8. Risk implications

- 8.1. The recommendations in this report seek approval to submit Brighton & Hove's Local SEND Reform Plan to the DfE within the statutory deadline and to proceed to implementation. The key risks associated with this decision, including the risks of not agreeing the recommendations, are set out below.
- 8.2. **Risk of non-submission or delayed approval (if recommendations are not agreed)**

- **Impact:** Failure to approve and submit the Plan by the 19 June 2026 deadline would result in non-compliance with DfE requirements. This would place the council at significant risk of losing or delaying access to critical funding streams, including the High Needs Stability Grant (supporting c.90% of the existing DSG deficit), Experts at Hand and transformation funding (c.£1.75m per annum), and capital investment opportunities. This would have a direct and adverse impact on the council's financial sustainability, SEND sufficiency programme, and ability to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people. It would also increase the likelihood of enhanced external scrutiny.
- **Mitigation:** The report seeks timely Urgent Leader decision approval ahead of the deadline, with delegated authority for final amendments to ensure the Plan remains compliant with DfE requirements.

8.3. **Financial sustainability risk (including delivery of planned investments)**

- **Impact:** The Plan requires significant investment (c.£3.483m annual revenue and c.£8.3m capital over the programme period). Without successful implementation, there is a risk that projected reductions in high-cost placements will not be realised, leading to continued High Needs Block deficits (forecast c.£7m–£11m annually). This would impact wider council financial resilience and create pressure across One Council services.
- **Mitigation:** The Plan is explicitly designed to shift investment toward early intervention and inclusion, reducing long-term costs. Financial monitoring, alignment with DSG recovery expectations, and phased implementation will support affordability and sustainability.

8.4. **Delivery and workforce capacity risk**

- **Impact:** Implementation is dependent on rapid mobilisation, including recruitment of specialist workforce (e.g. Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists) and delivery infrastructure. National workforce shortages present a risk to delivering key elements (e.g. Experts at Hand), which could limit impact on waiting times and early intervention.
- **Mitigation:** The Plan includes a phased workforce strategy, use of alternative delivery models (including commissioning and partnerships), and close alignment with ICB workforce plans. Delegated authority enables adjustment to delivery models where required.

8.5. **Partnership and system alignment risk (including ICB)**

- **Impact:** Delivery depends on strong partnership with the NHS Sussex ICB and wider system partners. Any misalignment, particularly during ICB restructuring, could affect delivery of integrated health services, slowing progress against Plan priorities and weakening outcomes.

- **Mitigation:** The Plan has joint sign-off at system level, with named SRO accountability, strengthened governance through the SEND & AP Partnership Board, and ongoing joint oversight arrangements to manage delivery risks.

8.6. **Implementation and programme delivery risk**

- **Impact:** The Plan includes ambitious, multi-year transformation requiring effective programme management, governance and performance monitoring. Failure to deliver milestones, KPIs or measurable impact may result in loss of confidence from DfE, risk to future funding, and limited improvement in outcomes.
- **Mitigation:** A strengthened programme structure is in place, including SRO oversight, defined workstreams, KPI tracking, and a shared data dashboard. Ongoing co-production and iterative development will support delivery and continuous improvement.

8.7. **Reputational and strategic risk**

- **Impact:** Failure to secure approval, submit a compliant Plan, or deliver improvements would negatively impact the council's reputation, increase external scrutiny, and undermine delivery of Corporate Plan priorities (particularly a fair and inclusive city and improved outcomes for children and young people).
- **Mitigation:** The Plan provides a clear, evidence-based and co-produced strategy aligned with national reform expectations and local priorities, supported by robust governance and assurance arrangements.

8.8. **Overall risk position:**

Approval of the recommendations reduces immediate and high-impact financial, compliance and reputational risks, and enables the council to access critical funding and progress system reform. While implementation risks remain, these are actively managed through strengthened governance, partnership working, and a phased, deliverable transformation programme.

9. **Equalities implications**

- 9.1 The Local SEND Reform Plan is about reshaping the system so more children can thrive in mainstream and local provision. By earlier intervention, inclusive practice, access to advice, and early support before needs become more complex.
- 9.2 It was a requirement that the local authority led the local partnership to work together on the plan and this included Task and Finish Groups consisting of workshop meetings, surveys and review of data in collaboration with our local partners and stakeholders.

- 9.3 The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in-depth needs assessment (2025) described the current and future health, learning and care needs of children and young people up to 25 years old in Brighton & Hove with SEND, learning disabilities (LD) or neurodiversity (ND). The 5 recommendation themes will be incorporated within the development of the Local SEND Reform Plan.
- 9.4 A draft EIA has been prepared to accompany the Plan and will be aligned with the SEN Sufficiency EIA. The EIA for the Plan will be developed and finalised after the DfE has provided feedback on the Plan and further engagement work with the local partnership, children and young people, and other stakeholders

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 The Local SEND Reform Plan is not expected to have significant direct environmental impacts; however, it has a number of positive indirect sustainability benefits aligned to the council's Carbon Neutral 2030 commitments.
- 10.2 The Plan promotes early intervention, strengthened local provision and increased inclusion within mainstream settings, which is expected to reduce the need for out-of-area placements and associated travel. This supports more sustainable travel patterns and reduces transport-related emissions. The development of locality-based models (such as Experts at Hand) and increased use of outreach and remote support will further minimise unnecessary travel.
- 10.3 There are also positive impacts in terms of sustainable communities and wellbeing, as the Plan supports children and young people to access education and services within their local communities, strengthening social cohesion and reducing inequalities. Workforce investment and service development will contribute to the local economy and skills development.
- 10.4 Potential minor negative impacts relate to increased resource use and estate requirements associated with expansion of provision and programme delivery. These will be mitigated through adherence to the council's sustainable procurement policies, efficient use of existing buildings, and consideration of energy efficiency and low-carbon approaches in any capital developments.
- 10.5 Overall, the Plan is considered to have a net positive sustainability impact, particularly through reducing travel demand, supporting local delivery models, and contributing to healthier, more inclusive communities.

11. Health and Wellbeing Implications:

- 11.1. The Local SEND Reform Plan is expected to have significant positive impacts on both physical and mental health, particularly for children and young people with SEND and their families.

- 11.2. For Starting Well (children, young people and families), the Plan will improve early identification, reduce waiting times, and increase access to timely support across education, health and care. This is anticipated to improve developmental outcomes, reduce anxiety associated with delays in support, and strengthen family resilience. Increased inclusion in local mainstream settings will also support social connection, belonging and improved emotional wellbeing.
- 11.3. For Living Well (working age adults), particularly parents and carers, the Plan is expected to reduce stress and uncertainty through more coordinated, responsive services and clearer pathways to support. This may improve mental wellbeing, support employment stability, and reduce the wider socioeconomic impacts associated with caring for children with unmet needs.
- 11.4. For Ageing Well, there are no direct impacts; however, improved preparation for adulthood for young people with SEND will support longer-term independence, health outcomes and reduced reliance on adult services in the future.
- 11.5. The Plan will particularly benefit groups who are disproportionately affected by health inequalities, including children and young people with SEND, those with neurodevelopmental needs, families on lower incomes, and those who experience barriers to accessing services. By strengthening early intervention, improving local provision, and embedding co-production, the Plan aims to reduce inequalities in access, experience and outcomes.
- 11.6. Potential risks include short-term pressure on services during implementation, which could impact waiting times or staff capacity. These are mitigated through phased delivery, workforce investment (including Experts at Hand), strengthened partnership working with health services, and ongoing performance monitoring.
- 11.7. Overall, the Plan is expected to deliver a net positive impact on health and wellbeing, supporting improved outcomes, reduced inequalities, and stronger, more resilient communities.

Other Implications

12. Procurement implications

- 12.1 There are no external contracting activities within this report so there are no procurement implications.

13. Crime & disorder implications:

- 13.1. The Local SEND Reform Plan is expected to have a positive impact on community safety and the prevention of crime and disorder, in line with the council's duties under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
- 13.2. The Plan strengthens early intervention, inclusion and coordinated multi-agency support for children and young people with SEND, including those at

risk of exclusion or disengagement from education. By improving access to timely support, reducing unmet need, and increasing inclusion within mainstream settings, the Plan is expected to reduce risk factors associated with vulnerability to exploitation, anti-social behaviour, and youth offending.

- 13.3. In particular, improved pathways through the Experts at Hand model, enhanced alternative provision, and stronger partnership working across education, health, social care and community safety services will support earlier identification of risk and more coordinated responses. This will contribute to reducing escalation into crisis, involvement with the criminal justice system, and substance misuse.
- 13.4. The Plan will particularly benefit groups who are disproportionately at risk of negative outcomes, including children and young people with SEND, those excluded or at risk of exclusion, and those from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 13.5. No significant negative impacts on crime and disorder are identified. Any potential risks linked to system pressures during implementation will be mitigated through phased delivery, strengthened safeguarding arrangements, and ongoing multi-agency oversight.
- 13.6. Overall, the Plan supports a preventative, system-wide approach to improving community safety, reducing inequalities, and promoting positive life outcomes for children and young people.

14. Conclusion

- 14.1. Approval of the Local SEND Reform Plan is essential to enable the Local Area partnership and Brighton & Hove City Council to meet the Department for Education's statutory submission deadline and secure access to significant associated funding, including the High Needs Stability Grant and transformation funding. The Plan sets out a clear, evidence-based and co-produced strategy to improve outcomes, experiences and life chances for children and young people with SEND, while supporting the delivery of the Council's Plan priorities.
- 14.2. The recommended course of action (to approve and submit the plan) will enable the council and its partners to move at pace into implementation, strengthening early intervention, increasing inclusion, improving local provision, and delivering a more sustainable and integrated system. It also ensures appropriate governance and flexibility through delegated authority to respond to final DfE requirements.
- 14.3. Failure to approve the recommendations would result in significant financial, operational and reputational risks, including loss of funding, reduced system capacity, and limited ability to deliver planned improvements.
- 14.4. For these reasons, approval of the recommendations and submission of the Plan represents the most effective and responsible course of action to

support children and young people with SEND, their families, and the long-term sustainability of local services.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

1. BHCC Annex A Local SEND Reform Plan
2. BHCC Annex B (00) Local SEND Reform Plan Glossary

2. Background documents

1. Schools White Paper – SEND Reform: Putting Children & Young People First: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/send-reform-putting-children-and-young-people-first/send-reform-putting-children-and-young-people-first-html-version>
2. DfE Experts at Hand SEND Transformation Fund – Funding for LAs: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/experts-at-hand-local-authority-send-transformation-fund/experts-at-hand-local-authority-send-transformation-fund-funding-for-local-authorities-2026-to-2027>
3. DfE- Developing and delivering the Experts at Hand Offer in Year 1 (June 2026 Guidance):[Developing and delivering the Experts at Hand offer in year 1: supporting guidance - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/experts-at-hand-offer-in-year-1-supporting-guidance)