

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 JANUARY 2025**

SEND STRATEGY 2025-2029

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present the draft Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2025-2029. It details the key elements of the Strategy and the planned implementation with partners.

Summary

2. The SEND Strategy establishes our strategic approach to the delivery of SEND services for children and young people in Darlington, ensuring the offer is coordinated and responsive to the needs of our community. The strategy sets out our shared local area vision, principles, and priorities to ensure that partners across the Darlington local area are working together effectively to identify, assess and meet the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) from birth to the age of 25. The SEND Strategy has been coproduced with partners across the borough, and is fundamental to implementing partners responsibilities under the Children and Families Act 2014. It reflects the ambitions and priorities of the Council Plan and other key strategic documents.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that the committee notes the priorities outlined in the strategy.

Reasons

4. The recommendations are supported by the following reason; the strategy is produced in the context of the statutory requirements set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 together with the guidance in the SEN Code of Practice that was issued alongside the 2014 Act. These provisions include the duty to keep under review the educational provision, training provision and social care provision made in its area for children and young people who have special educational needs or a disability and made outside its area for children and young people for whom it is responsible who have special educational needs or who have a disability (section 27 of the 2014 Act).

Tony Murphy
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Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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| Council Plan | The strategy supports the commitments for children and young people-supporting the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations. |
| Addressing inequalities | This strategy sets out our local plan for addressing inequalities faced by young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) and ensuring that they can receive access to high quality educational provision and outcomes. |
| Tackling Climate Change | The effective delivery of this strategy will support the council's Climate Change priorities. |
| Efficient and effective use of resources | The strategy supports the commitments in the council's Safety Valve Agreement to ensure efficient use of the Designated School Grant High Needs Block. |
| Health and Wellbeing | Health lifestyles of children and young people is a key component of the SEND strategy. |
| S17 Crime and Disorder | There are no specific elements of the strategy which address crime and disorder. |
| Wards Affected | All wards are affected. |
| Groups Affected | Children, young people families and key stakeholders. |
| Budget and Policy Framework | 2014 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice. |
| Key Decision | Yes. |
| Urgent Decision | No. |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | The effective delivery of the strategy will positively benefit looked after children and care leavers. |

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

5. Darlington Council and its partners, including parents, schools, colleges, health and the voluntary sector, are ambitious for all children and young people and are committed to supporting them to achieve their best outcomes. For children and young people with special educational needs aged 0-25, this requires partners, to work together to ensure that there is high quality, integrated and inclusive education, and support that is flexible and responsive.
6. The SEND Strategy provides the framework for partners to work together to achieve the vision and outcomes for SEND in Darlington. The draft strategy has been extensively co-produced with children and young people, the Darlington Parent Carer Forum and the Integrated Care Board (ICB). In addition, professionals from the council and education

providers have contributed to the development of the strategy. The voices of children and young people have been central to developing both the strategic objectives and outcomes in the strategy.

7. An extensive engagement exercise has been undertaken with young people. Officers have met with over 70 young people in early years, primary, secondary, Further education and specialist settings to ensure that young people's priorities have shaped the development of the strategy. The overarching themes included in the strategy have largely come directly from these discussions. In developing this strategy, what is important to children and young people and what they want to do and achieve in their lives now, and in the future, has been considered.
8. The Darlington Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2025–2029 describes the partners' collective vision and aspirations for children and young people with special educational needs and provides a framework for partners to collaborate to deliver shared priorities for the next four years and sets out how they will be implemented.
9. During the period of the Strategy there will be further changes to meet children's needs going forward, the context will evolve as the new government's priorities become clearer and the landscape of schools and providers will develop. The Strategy therefore needs to have sufficient flexibility to ensure that different or emerging issues can be incorporated.
10. Darlington has experienced an increase in the number of pupils with SEND, particularly those with EHCPs. There has been a 13.5% rise in requests for assessment compared to this same period in Dec 2022. The largest growth is in the under-fives and post 16/18 age groups. This growth mirrors the regional picture. All the local specialist provision is at capacity. The Council is working productively with local partners and national government to expand specialist capacity in Darlington and maintain a positive financial position through the implementation of the Safety Valve agreement to address the historic deficit on the High Needs Block.
11. The vision for SEND is ambitious and aspirational, it stretches beyond the boundaries of the Local Authority to all partners and children and young people with SEND, with or without an EHCP.
12. The implementation of the SEND Strategy will be guided by the following principles:
 - (a) Maximising the potential of a continuum of local provision in Darlington for children, young people and young adults from 0 to 25 years of age.
 - (b) Further developing partnerships with health, other agencies and parents/carers to ensure effective collaboration to meet the needs of children, young people and young adults.
 - (c) Developing an integrated approach in the development and delivery of personalised provision, that includes joint decision-making processes between education, social care and health.
 - (d) Prioritising early assessment of need and ensuring timely intervention and support.

- (e) Every provider, school, college or other setting, in Darlington to have good or outstanding provision for children, young people and young adults with additional needs and have access to high quality professional development and support.
 - (f) Using all data available effectively to identify issues to inform the strategy and monitor its effectiveness over time.
 - (g) Including parents/carers and young people's voice in the development of the strategy.
 - (h) Ensuring that current and future SEND Reforms are an integral element of the SEND Strategy and progress towards implementation is monitored by appropriate bodies.
13. Five key areas, building on the preparation for adulthood outcomes as outlined in the Code of Practice 2015, were used as headings in the consultation and form the framework for this strategy. This approach will encourage a more effective pathway into adulthood and enable young people to build on life skills and support their aspirations:
- (a) Being as healthy as possible;
 - (b) Having good education, training and opportunities;
 - (c) Family, Friends and Relationships;
 - (d) Into Adulthood towards independence;
 - (e) Darlington - our town, community and environment.

Financial Implications

14. The Council is delivering the outcomes outlined in the Safety Valve Agreement with the Department for Education to address the historic deficit on the Dedicated School Grant High Needs Block. The Council is on track to meet the projected deficit target in 2024/25. Based on current projections the council is on track to achieve a £0 DSG deficit by the end of the agreement, but this is subject to any increased demand pressures in the future.

Legal Implications

15. The Council also has duties under the Children and Families Act 2014 to make special educational provision for children and young people whose needs cannot reasonably be met from the resources normally available to schools and post-16 institutions. The Council has additional statutory duties under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to provide education for pupils needing alternative education and under the Children and Families Act 2014 to meet the needs of pupils and young people up to the age of 25 with special educational needs. Approval of the SEND Strategy contributes to the fulfilment by the Council of these obligations.

HR Implications

16. There are no direct HR implications associated with this report.

Estates and Property Advice

17. There are no direct estates implications associated with this report.

Procurement Advice

18. There are no direct procurement implications associated with this report.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

19. The effective delivery of this strategy will support the council's Climate Change priorities. Specifically, by reducing the need to access specialist provision through the continued development of early intervention models. Specialist out of area provision often requires significantly longer travel to school.

Equalities considerations

20. Children and young people with SEND often experience inequalities of access and outcomes across the country. Each of the key priorities aims to address the inequalities experienced by children, young people and families. The core work, in strengthening mainstream provision will enhance the principles of inclusion and providing nurturing environments for all, regardless of their needs.

Consultation

21. Initial consultation on this strategy took place with a range of partners through 2024. The SEND Strategy has been co-produced with key stakeholders including children and young people and parents/carers. Plans are in place to start a conversation with the wider population, this will include further conversation with parents, carers, children, and young people and stakeholders about how best they can be supported to achieve the co-produced vision and outcomes. The consultation process will use a combination of electronic and online consultation and engagement events.

Outcome of Consultation

22. A public consultation to gather views on the strategy opened on 25 October 2024 and was due to finish on 31 December 2024. Following analysis of the consultation responses a final version of the strategy will be brought to a future cabinet for decision.