

# Policy Committee

16 June 2026



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

<b>Title</b>	Reading Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disability SEND Reform Plan
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report</b>	Lara Patel, Executive Director Children's Service
<b>Report author</b>	Brian Grady, Director of Education
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Rachel Eden, Lead Councillor Public Health and Education
<b>Council priority</b>	Safeguard & support the health & wellbeing of Reading's adults & children
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. That Policy Committee review the proposed Local Area SEND Reform Plan for Reading.</li><li>2. That Policy Committee approve the Plan, subject to HM Government funding allocations as proposed being made available.</li><li>3. That Policy Committee delegate sign off of the Plan to the specified officers in line with published guidance, namely the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and Executive Director of Children's Services.</li></ol>

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. On Monday 23 February HM Government published wide ranging reforms for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability in its [SEND reform consultation Putting Children and Young People First](#).
- 1.2. Through the proposals set out in the SEND reforms, the Government aims to: provide children with SEND with a broader curriculum, boost outcomes for the most disadvantaged, and transform support to create a more inclusive system for those with SEND.
- 1.3. The reforms include a roadmap to access the financial support being made available to Local Authorities for both transformation and for the High Needs Block, including access to a Sustainability Grant equating to 90% of the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit as of end of financial year 2025/26.
- 1.4. The SEND Reform Plan must be a partnership plan. Plans need to be signed off by both the NHS ICB and Council and delivered to the DfE by 19 June for money to be released to Local Authorities in the autumn term.
- 1.5. The SEND reform proposals align strongly with how we work in Reading and will help us fulfil our ambition in Reading for an even more inclusive education system, where every child has a school place in their neighbourhood that meets their needs, they

achieve well at school and have better outcomes, and to achieve a balanced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Block budget.

- 1.6. Officers have worked with Health partners, parents and carers, children and young people and school leaders to deliver a shared vision and response to the proposals, and to deliver a partnership SEND Reform Plan by the deadline of 19 June 2026. This plan is attached for Policy Committee review and consideration as Appendix 1.

## **2. Policy Context**

- 2.1. HM Government have commissioned each local area partnership to develop and submit a Local SEND reform plan by 19 June 2026, underpinned by a Local Partnership Maturity Assessment. The Plan is required to set out how the local area partnership (convened by Reading Borough Council and including schools, NHS integrated Care Board and NHS providers, and children and families) will improve and further strengthen our local SEND system, with a focus on stronger inclusive practice and early intervention, and ensuring that the conditions underpinning effective long-term outcomes for children with SEND are in place.
- 2.2. All local authorities with a SEND deficit will be eligible in 2026–27 to receive a High Needs Stability Grant covering 90% of their High Needs related DSG deficit accrued up to the end of 2025–26. This grant will only be paid once each local authority has secured approval from HM Government of the local area's SEND reform plan. Payments will be made from Autumn 2026 for local authorities whose local area plans are approved in the first round of assessment. For deficits that arise in 2026–27 and 2027–28, HM Government have stated they will take an "appropriate and proportionate approach, though it will not be unlimited". Future support will take into account LAs' successful delivery of their approved Local SEND Reform Plan, including appropriate use of investment to establish an Experts at Hand offer.
- 2.3. Where a local authority's Plan does not meet the threshold for approval, they will be required to revise and improve their Plan, with continued support from advisers, to ensure they meet the required standard. Revised Plans meet the required approval threshold, will receive payments in Spring 2027, within the 2026-27 financial year. Local authorities will not receive any payments until their Local SEND Reform Plan has been approved.
- 2.4. HM Government SEND reform proposals are focused on building the most inclusive education system. The reform proposals cite international jurisdictions of education in their examples and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. To achieve this more inclusive education system, HM Government propose to:
  - strengthen the law to ensure evidence-based support for children and young people is provided early in mainstream settings so they can stay in education, achieve and thrive alongside their peers;
  - integrate support across health, care, and family services, ensuring children's needs are identified and addressed as soon as they emerge; and
  - increase upfront investment so support is readily available for classes and communities of children, rather than locked behind lengthy and bureaucratic individual assessment processes.

## **3. The Proposal**

- 3.1. Reading's Draft Reform Plan is attached at Appendix 1. The proposed actions aim to deliver a whole-system transformation. Delivery of the Plan will be supported through joint partnership governance with the NHS ICB, schools, parents and carers, shared data infrastructure and ongoing partnership evaluation, ensuring that both implementation and impact are continuously monitored and refined.

3.2. The Plan is structured around four key priorities as set out in the below diagram:

**Strengthening inclusion across education settings**– organising places and provision to meet as many needs as possible, as close to home as possible, with all settings and providers moving towards a shared understanding and consistent practices around inclusion.

**System leadership, local partnership collaboration and co-production**– putting in place the enabling conditions across a local area that ensures planning and provision reflects the local area & is joined up, including strategic co-production with parent carers and children and young people.

**Access to specialist support and local placements** – improving collaboration between settings and deploying expertise from a range of specialist and expert sources, to support schools and settings to meet the needs of children and young people earlier and locally.

**Encouraging inclusive culture & behaviours** – using funding and shared accountability towards a system that works for children and families while achieving value for money.

3.3. Over the three year period of the Plan, proposed actions will, subject to funding, result in:

- Increased capacity within mainstream settings to meet a wider range of children’s needs.
- Reduced reliance on statutory assessment and specialist placements.
- More consistent inclusive practice across the education system.
- Stronger alignment between education, health and care services.
- Reduce costs of placements, and in particular reduce the number of children attending Independent and Non Maintained Special Schools.
- Support improved outcomes for children.

3.4. **Early Intervention – Experts at Hand (EAH) Model.** Aligned to the Government model set out above of strengthening inclusion across education settings, the Reading Local Area Plan includes an expansion of our current advisory support offer to create a multi-disciplinary Experts at Hand (EAH) Offer. Experts at Hand is a core pillar of the reforms, with the intention that local areas receive investment to secure more timely access to Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, behaviour and emotional health support.

3.5. This multi-disciplinary team will provide direct delivery of specialist support into mainstream and specialist school as well as FE settings, including out-of-area providers. The proposals set out in the attached Plan aim to ensure children’s needs are met as early as possible, so that more children can attend a mainstream school.

3.6. The Expert at Hand model extends across the entire children’s system, as is illustrated in the diagram below:



3.7. The local area partnership proposes to build capacity through this model, which shifts the focus from provision-led responses to evidence-informed, partnership-delivered early intervention. Rather than operating as a standalone service, Experts at Hand is a system enabler, strengthening the ability of mainstream, specialist and post-16 settings to meet need earlier and more effectively. This is achieved through coordinated multi-disciplinary input, including Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, behaviour support and wider emotional health services.

3.8. **Strengthening Mainstream Inclusion**

3.9. Aligned to the Plan priority of mainstream inclusion as the default, we are seeking to build on the already inclusive education system we have in Reading. We will achieve this through investment in workforce development and inclusive practice and the expansion of our SEND advisory behavioural and outreach support offer as part of our Experts at Hand approach

3.10. Strengthening mainstream inclusion will result in an increased proportion of children with SEND supported in mainstream schools, and improved attendance, engagement and outcomes for children with SEND.

3.11. **Sufficiency and Local Provision**

3.12. Aligned to the Plan focus on local capacity and reduced reliance on independent provision, we are continuing to deliver our ambitious school place expansion programme of investment in Additionally Resourced Provision and more specialist places, with the delivery of 120 new special school places by 2027/28 and a further 120-200 places by 2030, co located on mainstream school campuses to create truly inclusive education campuses for Reading children.

- 3.13. Our proposals also include plans to continue expansion of Additionally Resourced Provision, particularly in secondary and Further Education settings and the development of a clear continuum of provision able to meet the full range of children's needs.
- 3.14. Actions to develop sufficiency will see a reduction in Independent and Non-Maintained Special School placements and out-of-area costs,
- 3.15. **Data, Commissioning and Financial Sustainability**
- 3.16. The Partnership is embedding data dashboards and shared metrics to track inclusion, early identification, exclusions, attendance and escalation, using screening tools and outcome data to inform early intervention and provision planning and drawing on national programmes, including the NHS-led Partnerships for inclusion of neurodiversity in schools (PINS) programme to embed inclusive practice across the system.

#### **4. Contribution to Strategic Aims**

- 4.1. The Council Plan has established five priorities for 2025/28. These priorities are:
  - Promote more equal communities in Reading
  - Secure Reading's economic and cultural success
  - Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce our carbon footprint
  - Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children
  - Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future
- 4.2. In delivering these priorities, we will be guided by the following set of principles:
  - Putting residents first
  - Building on strong foundations
  - Recognising, respecting, and nurturing all our diverse communities
  - Involving, collaborating, and empowering residents
  - Being proudly ambitious for Reading
- 4.3. Proposals set out in the reforms will help the Council achieve its objectives to safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children, promote more equal communities in Reading and secure Reading's economic and cultural success

#### **5. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 5.1. Proposals set out in our reform plan aim to enable more children to access a local school place, reducing the need for school transport.
- 5.2. Our plans for new school places focus on developing currently existing spare capacity in our school estate, therefore promoting sustainable building use and reducing carbon impact associated with new build.

#### **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1. Headteachers, parents and health partners are being engaged through weekly borough wide meetings and local school cluster sessions to inform proposals. Parents are being engaged through Reading Families Forum. Education Partnership Board have met twice to consider and endorse plan proposals.
- 6.2. Further community engagement will be undertaken to publicise the transformational nature of the local area reform plan to communicate the benefits for local children and families in July, before the end of term. Where significant changes are being made for

children and families or where significant changes are being made to provision, formal consultation will be undertaken as appropriate.

## 7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. Plan proposals are anticipated to make a positive impact for children with disabilities.
- 7.2. There are a range of substantive changes in the proposals, including potentially to school organisation arrangements, which will require an Equality Impact and Needs Assessment.

## 8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1. Substantive changes to school organisation may lead to a risk of staffing implications, including potential redeployment requirements and redundancy impacts. RBC HR team are assessing options for potential impacts which will inform future reports brought to relevant Committees.

## 9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. Full legal assessment of proposals will need to be considered as the SEND reform proposals consultation concludes and legislation is prepared.

## 10. Financial Implications

### 10.1. Funding

- 10.2. The White Paper outlines £4bn of what is badged as new revenue funding over the next 3 years. This is not broken down to individual Local Authority level. Funding will come through as a separate grant for 26/27 and then merge into the school's formula in 27/28 with the majority of funding following relevant deprivation measures.
- 10.3. Of the total investment available, the White Paper identifies £1.6 billion to be allocated to early year's, school and post-16 settings, to run targeted and small group interventions at the earliest signs of children having additional needs.
- 10.4. The total investment also includes £1.8 billion for 'Experts at Hand':
  - every council working with Integrated Care Boards and health board will commission local professionals – educational psychology, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and more – so they are routinely available in every area, whether or not children have an EHCP
  - special and alternative provision schools to provide expert training, direct interventions with children and short-term placements in their schools
  - once rolled out an average secondary school will receive over 160 days – around an additional full school year - worth of dedicated specialist time every year
- 10.5. Reading Borough Council have received confirmation of the proposed 26/27 and estimated 27/28 and 28/29 investment for Experts at Hand. The investment allows for up to 10% of the investment to be allocated to management of Experts At Hand (EAH) and a further 10% for capacity to lead reforms locally.

	<b>26/27 proposed</b>	<b>27/28 estimated</b>	<b>28/29 estimated</b>
<b>Reading Total</b>	<b>£1,291,084</b>	<b>£2,255,571</b>	<b>£2,556,314</b>

80% for EAH	£1,032,867	£1,804,457	£2,045,051
10% Transformation	£129,108	£225,557	£255,631
10% EAH	£129,108	£225,557	£255,631

- 10.6. £200 million to fund a dedicated SEND outreach and support offer in every Best Start Family Hub.
- 10.7. £200 million to ensure all local authorities can transform how they operate in line with our reforms while maintaining current SEND services
- 10.8. £200 million to train every teacher to be a teacher of children with SEND
- 10.9. In addition, there is £3.7 billion of capital funding to create 60,000 new places for children with SEND, including the 10,000 places already delivered.

#### **10.10. Other Changes**

- 10.11. Over time, there is also a plan to re-balance funding, directing more funding into core budgets for schools and colleges, while maintaining strong support for those with the most complex needs. This will require a transfer of funding from the High Needs Block to the Schools Block of the DSG. This is not additional funding, but it will give schools greater certainty of funding. At the moment, this money is currently allocated to education settings through EHCP 'top-ups', but in future, more of it will go straight into schools' and colleges' core budgets so they can respond to children and young people's needs more quickly and flexibly.
- 10.12. From 2027, the DfE will consider transitional arrangements that local areas can take to further increase the amount of funding that mainstream schools receive to provide SEND support directly, in advance of statutory changes. The aim is to improve inclusive provision by putting more funding for SEND into schools' and colleges' core budgets – with settings meeting a greater proportion of SEND costs out of their budgets and to ensure top-up funding is only for higher cost provision.

Independent Special Schools will come under a new regulatory regime; changing the law on independent special schools to ensure that children get suitable high-quality placements and that local authorities pay a reasonable price for them.

#### **11. Timetable for Implementation**

- 11.1. The reform changes in total will be rolled out between 2026 and 20230, with the emphasis on investment in the first years before the introduction of legislation.

#### **12. Background Papers**

HM Government Local SEND Reform Plan – guidance and template  
 HM Government Local SEND Reform Quality Assessment Framework

#### **Appendices**

1. Draft Reading Local Area SEND Reform Plan submission