	Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee 18 September 2024
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People and NHS Borough Director
	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Councillor Gwen Grahl
Overview of SEND Provision across the Borough	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non-Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	Appendix 1 - SEND Strategy 2021-2025
Background Papers:	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-and-alternative-provision-improvement-plan
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Shirley Parks Director, Education, Partnerships and Strategy Shirley.parks@brent.gov.uk Roxanna Glennon Head of Inclusion Roxanna.glennon@brent.gov.uk Jonathan Turner Borough Director, Brent Integrated Care Partnership jonathanturner2@nhs.net

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of services for Brent's children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). It provides an update about the previous report on SEND to the Scrutiny and Wellbeing Committee in September 2023, recommendations arising from that and references the local area position in relation to a future inspection by Ofsted/CQC on the effectiveness of local area SEND partnership arrangements. The report also includes an update on delivery of the Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme, aimed at reducing pressure on the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools' Grant.
- 1.2 The report demonstrates Brent's commitment to working collaboratively with partners and stakeholders to co-produce the service offer in line with both statutory guidelines and the needs of Brent's community. In the face of ever-increasing financial

pressures on all services that work to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND and their families, this report includes clear examples where the Brent local partnership is working in a proactive, ambitious and dynamic way to overcome these challenges in a sustainable manner.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and comment on the content of the report.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities

3.1.1 The services referred to in this report support delivery of the Council's Borough Plan priority 'Best Start in Life', which aims to support all children and young people through access to education and opportunity by working in partnership with schools and other partners. Services for children and young people with SEND support their education in early years settings, schools and post-16 institutions.

3.2 Background

National Context

3.2.1 The legal duties introduced in The Children and Families Act 2014 place responsibilities on the local area partnership (the local authority, health partners, settings, schools and colleges) to identify and meet the needs of children aged 0-25 who have SEND. defined in the Act as:

- **Special Educational Needs:** A child or young person has special educational needs if he/she has a learning difficulty or a disability which calls for special educational provision to be made or them.
- **Learning Difficulty:** A child or a young person of compulsory school age has a learning difficulty or disability if they:
 - Have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others the same age, or
 - Have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions or in employment without support.

3.2.2 The duties and reforms to the SEND system introduced in 2014 aspired to achieve an integrated 0-25 system spanning education, health and care, driven by high ambition and preparation for adulthood. The Brent SEND Strategy 2021-25 is the vehicle to express how the Brent Children's Trust is implementing the Code of Practice 2015, that sets out how the Act should be interpreted. The strategy, that was co-created by parents, carers and those who work with them across the local area partnership, sets out the Children's Trust vision, ambitions and priorities for children with SEND. The local area partnership has developed an action plan to support the delivery of the ambitions set out in the SEND Strategy 2021-25. Actions on the plan are reviewed at each Children's Trust relevant to the topic of discussion to ensure that effective progress is made in its delivery.

3.2.3 The challenges facing the national system to support children and young people with SEND have been highlighted in several government reviews and reports, including

national SEND Reviews in 2019 and 2022 and reports to the Education Select Committee, the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee and, most recently, the Isos Partnership report on SEND (published July 2024 and jointly commissioned by the Local Government Association and the County Council Network). Focus has been on how the system can be made to work best for all families and how it can ensure the effective and sustainable use of resources.

3.2.4 In response, the government published the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan in March 2023, that sits alongside reforms to health and social care, including the introduction of Integrated Care Systems and wider reforms to adult social care, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the Ofsted and CQC Inspection Framework for SEND.

3.2.5 Since publication of the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, there has been a change of government. The new government has at the time of writing not made clear its position with regards to SEND. Therefore, this paper assumes that the direction of travel set by the previous government's plan for SEND still stands (though this assumption is caveated by the acknowledgement that this situation may alter). If the findings of Ofsted's recent 'Big Listen' (published September 2024) were to impact the Government's educational agenda moving forwards, it can be inferred from the findings of the Big Listen that provision for children with SEND will remain a political priority within the context of education, with key foci being the funding of SEND provision and the assessment of the quality of that provision (especially within a mainstream context).

3.2.6 The Improvement Plan identifies three key challenges facing the SEND system nationally that it sets out to address:

- a) Outcomes for children and young people with SEN or in alternative provision are poor and young people are not as well prepared for adulthood and employment as they should be.
- b) Navigating the SEND and alternative provision system is not a positive experience for children, young people and their families, who need confidence that their children will get the right support, in the right place and at the right time.
- c) Despite unprecedented investment in the high needs budget, the system is not delivering financial sustainability and value for money in meeting the needs of children, young people and families.

3.2.7 Over the past year, the Department for Education has been testing the development of new national standards to address these challenges with a small number of local authority and regional partnerships, with a view to establishing national standards by the end of 2025. The aim is to develop:

- An inclusive single national SEND and alternative provision system, that starts with improved mainstream provision that is built on early and accurate identification of needs, delivers high quality teaching of a knowledge-rich curriculum and gives prompt access to targeted support where it is needed. This includes establishing a 3-tier alternative provision system that includes targeted support, time-limited placements and longer-term placements.
- Nationally consistent standards for how needs are identified and met at every stage of a child's journey across education, health and care, including the development of a national digitised Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

process and conflict resolution via mandatory mediation rather than the first level tribunal system only.

- New statutory guidance to Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) that set out how statutory responsibilities for SEND should be discharged, a new performance framework and a new national framework of banding and price tariffs for funding SEND provision.

SEND Prevalence in Brent

- 3.2.8 As of September 2024, there are 3769 children and young people aged 0-25 with an EHCP on roll at Brent schools, which at 4.6% of the school population is similar to national. 11.2% of pupils are identified with additional needs that can be met at SEN support where a need is identified but does not meet threshold for an EHCP (compared to 13% nationally). 56% of children and young people with an EHCP are identified with communication and interaction needs (autistic spectrum disorder and speech, language and communication). The average growth in EHCP numbers has been approximately 10% over the last three years, consistent with the national position.
- 3.2.9 Between 2023 and 2024 the number of EHC Plans increased across all age groups, with the highest in the under 5 age group (42% compared to 25% nationally) and the 5 to 10 age group (9.7%, 11% nationally). Those age 5 to 10 account for 38% of the maintained EHC Plan cohort, age 11 to 15 accounts for 31% and those age 16 to 19 account for 17%. This means that additional local special places in both primary and secondary are needed to respond to increasing demand as EHCP numbers increase, as well as a growing need for provision for young people in the 16-25 age range. This is underpinned by the fact that 50% of new EHC Plans issued in 2023 are for children aged 5 to 10, 37% to children under 5, and 12% to those age 11 to 15.
- 3.2.10 As the number of EHCPs has increased, the number of children with an EHCP placed in mainstream schools has increased from 46% in 2020 to 65% in 2024. 78% of children and young people issued a new EHCP in 2024 are in mainstream school compared to 69% in 2021 (national 74%; statistical neighbours 77%) and 13% aged 0-25 are placed in special schools (national 11%; statistical neighbours 11%) (Source: SEN2 January 2024). Overall, 65% of children and young people with an EHCP in Brent aged 0-25 attend a mainstream provision – this is in line with the expectation in the Children and Family Act 2014 that all children should be educated in mainstream where possible.

Overview of provision for children and young people with SEND in Brent

Governance

- 3.2.11 Governance of the Brent SEND local area partnership is through the Children's Trust, chaired by the Corporate Director, Children and Young People. The Inclusion Strategic Board that reports to the Children's Trust brings together partners to review performance and discuss service developments. There continues to be collaboration across health, education and care and a commitment to work in partnership to make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people, building on the progress noted in Brent's 2019 Ofsted/CQC joint local area SEND Inspection. For children with SEND, priority areas of focus are:

- To support children and young people to achieve good mental health and resilience through addressing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) waiting times and implementing the 'Thrive' model.
- To build whole system pathways to support children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs through early intervention, and to manage rising demand at statutory levels.
- To ensure that neurodiverse children and young people and their families and carers are able to live well and receive appropriate and timely support when required.
- To address health inequalities.

3.2.12 Recent work undertaken to assess Brent's readiness for a Local Area SEND Inspection has revealed areas where partnership working could be strengthened, especially in the area of the joint strategic commissioning of services between health, and Brent Council (Children and Young People and Public Health services). The Children's Trust will be receiving a report on 24th September 2024 on progress across the health sector in meeting the needs of children with SEND through commissioned services. This report will be used as to confirm the Local Area partnership's approach to the joint commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND.

Engagement with stakeholders

3.2.13 Engagement with families through the Brent Parent Carer Forum (BPCF), which has over 900 members, continues to be strong. BPCF are active participants in the Inclusion Strategic Board and in the recently established Post-16 Sub-Group of the Board. To further formalise relations between the local authority and BPCF, and to set clear mutually agreed expectations and KPIs, a service level agreement (SLA) is currently being co-produced between the borough and BPCF (expected completion date of October 2024).

3.2.14 A Brent young people's network provides further opportunities to co-produce services. Co-production is central to all strategic developments and operates on a 'nothing about you without you' approach. This is clearly demonstrated in the SEND Strategy 2021-25, the ongoing oversight of the Local Offer/Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) website and, more recently, in the design of a new neurodiversity pathway and development of the supported employment programme. The Inclusion Service was tasked with devising a Youth Forum that supports the 2021-2025 SEND Strategy Plan. This Forum enables young people (14 – 25) with SEND to have an opportunity to be involved in a group whereby they can both receive information and help co-produce initiatives that will support children and young people with SEND (e.g. developments to the EHCP process, training on positive health and wellbeing and travelling independently). Since January 2024, 32 children and young people with SEND have engaged with this programme, with further events planned for October and November 2024 focussing on issues including wellbeing, independence and employment.

Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme

3.2.15 As reported to Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee in September 2023, participation in the Department for Education's DBV Programme (see High Needs Block (HNB) Current Position section 3.2.33 below) has been purposefully targeted in Brent towards developing an area wide response to increased demand from the under 7 age group through early intervention to prevent an EHCP where it is not

needed. A new model of working with schools and partners to deliver early intervention, known as 'Intervention First' (IF) to children with social, emotional and mental health needs was piloted during the 2023/24 academic year with the Harlesden cluster of schools. The project is funded by the DfE through the DBV programme until September 2025, but the evidence of the positive impact of this programme to date (both in terms of achieving better outcomes for children and their families, and in terms of cost avoidance on the HNB) suggests that it would be beneficial to explore options for maintaining this offer and broadening its reach to include all Brent schools. For example, at the start of the IF programme schools indicated that they were considering applying for an EHCP for 22 children (53.6% of participants) at the start of the 12-week programme. However, following successful intervention from the IF Team, only 1 school (2% of participants) went on to apply for an EHCP. The work of the IF Team aligns with Brent's aim to upskill the school work force (see 3.2.16, above) to ensure that all schools have the skills and confidence necessary to support a broad range of learners, including those with SEND.

3.2.16 The DBV programme has further elements, focussed on looking at how support for children with SEND is allocated within the borough, namely:

- The development of a model that better uses resources across the system ensuring improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND. This aspect of the commissioning strand has worked to develop a 'Resource Allocation System' (RAS) that seeks to increase the consistency and transparency of how HNB resources are allocated to individual pupils. The RAS was co-produced with schools and parents and will be piloted in the 24/25 academic year.
- The development and implementation of a SEND data dashboard. This dashboard is already fully operational, allowing a more granular monitoring of trends and workflows within SEND. For example, the dashboard has already supported the 0-25 team to considerably improve on their 20-week timeliness from circa 40% of plans issued within the 20-week statutory timescale at the end of 2023, to over 81% of plans being issued within statutory timescales (far higher than the national average of 50.3%).

Early identification of need

3.2.17 Systems for the early identification of need are well embedded. Multiagency decision-making panels that focus on shared responsibilities, such as the Joint Funding Panel, ensure that children and young people's complex needs are being met, including those of children eligible for Continuing Health Care (CHC). A recent positive development, led by the Brent Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) in response to challenges identified by educational settings in accessing support for children with medical needs who do not meet the threshold for CHC is the development of the 'Individual Funding Request' process. Settings have responded positively to this change; a change that demonstrates the positive impact of collaboration between the LA and health partners.

3.2.18 Through the School Effectiveness Partnership Board and regular meetings with headteachers, the Children and Young People's Department leads an effective partnership with local schools to deliver an inclusive agenda. Significant work has been undertaken to develop the capacity of mainstream schools in Brent to identify the SEN needs of pupils early so that they can be supported in the most appropriate way. This includes a SENCO training programme that covers a wide range of needs including autism, dyslexia and social, communication and emotional regulation (SCERTS), which is supporting schools to manage the increased number of young

children whose communication and interaction skills were impacted by the pandemic. The majority of schools have now embedded the Graduated Approach Framework (GAF) which is for children with a SEN need who do not require an EHCP.

- 3.2.19 Despite this increased support offer, some schools remain concerned about how to support children with increasing complexity of need who are being placed in mainstream schools. Relatedly, some parents also communicate to BPCF a lack of confidence in the ability of mainstream schools to meet the needs of their children. To further respond to this challenge, Brent has taken action to both increase the amount of support available to schools, and to increase the amount of funding schools receive for children who are placed in mainstream whilst they await a place in special school, to ensure that no child or setting is disadvantaged simply because of the type of school they attend. Plans are in progress to roll out further ASC specific training to schools in addition to SCERTS (namely, the 'Autism Education Trust' (AET) model), alongside further developing the speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) offer and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) training offer. These latter two training offers (SLCN and SEMH) are being developed in conjunction with colleagues from Health and Public Health.

SEND place planning

- 3.2.20 In response to growing demand in the primary, secondary and post-16 age group, in January 2022 Cabinet approved £44m of capital investment for 427 additional specialist places across mainstream and specialist provision, including a new secondary special school, with these additional places available for the 25/26 academic year. Despite this planned capital investment, increasing demand means that further local specialist places are needed, with current estimates suggesting that up to 188 additional primary and 34 additional secondary special school places are needed to meet current demand (as of September 2024) with further local specialist placements needed moving forwards if Brent is to meet rising demand and mitigate spend in the financially unsustainable independent sector. Brent is currently liaising with colleagues in the education sector to identify providers who may be interested in supporting the development of further specialist provision in the borough. This will help to secure placements for the 117 children with EHCPs in Brent mainstream schools awaiting a placement in a special school.
- 3.2.21 Insufficient specialist SEMH provision within Brent has been identified as an area of particular concern: insufficient capacity in this area is placing considerable financial pressure on the HNB, with 75 CYP with SEMH needs currently being supported in independent school placements at an average cost of £62,752.29/place/annum including transport (circa. £30,000/place/annum more than it would cost to support this vulnerable cohort in local, specialist maintained provision). Furthermore, the lack of specialist SEMH provision in Brent is placing significant pressure on our Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and AP places, as these places are occupied often by children waiting for a place in a specialist SEMH school, and so are not available to provide respite to local schools and children. The impact of this pressure on PRU and AP places is more children at risk of permanent exclusion (PEX) and fixed term exclusion (FTE) as schools cannot access the respite offer that may have mitigated the risk of PEX/FTE. A working group that comprises both LA and external stakeholders (schools and multi-academy trusts) is focusing on the rapid and sustainable development of additional specialist provision in Brent.

Preparation for Adulthood (PfA)

- 3.2.22 There is an expectation in the Code of Practice that a full range of opportunities must be provided to support young people to become visible, active members of society and this message is both embedded within the Brent Borough Plan 2023-2027 and the SEND Strategy 2021-2025. As the number of young people with an EHCP continues to grow, so will demand for supported internships and increased educational opportunities for post-16 CYP with SEND. The local authority is therefore expanding supported internships (SI) and opportunities for young people to prepare for adulthood through developing improved employability skills and work experience.
- 3.2.23 Delivery of the new Post-16 Skills Resource Centre at Welsh Harp will further contribute to meeting demand for places for young people with SEND, in particular young people aged 16-25 with complex learning difficulties. The new Post-16 Skills Resource Centre was agreed by Cabinet in May 2023. The Centre was originally planned to operate from two sites (Welsh Harp and Airco Close), but consideration is now being given to consolidating the provision on Welsh Harp site only. The Welsh Harp centre has a proposed opening date of September 2027.
- 3.2.24 A partnership wide 'Supported Employment Forum' continues to ensure that the offer developed for young people is meaningful and sustainable. The Council, working with anchor organisations including the College of North West London, has expanded the offer of supported internships. In the 23/24 AY, 68 interns participated in the programme with 33 successfully completing the course. Placement rotations included work in the Council and Wembley hotels. The remaining interns were located within the Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust.
- 3.2.25 A recently updated and co-produced travel assistance policy for Brent has been approved by Cabinet in June 2024. This new travel assistance policy has an increased focus on supporting children and young people with SEND to develop the skills they need to travel independently using public transport. Brent is currently in the process of tendering for a provider of 'independent travel training' (ITT). Once a provider is in place, Brent will have a much-improved PfA offer, as learning to travel safely and independently (where appropriate) is vital to promoting the wellbeing of children and young people with SEND and this service will be offered free of charge to all eligible young people.
- 3.2.26 The Council is looking to support employers across Brent to be autism aware and to expand the number of employers who are achieving the disability confident standards. Brent Works and CYP lead the supported employment forum and through continued development of the post-16 offer, the Brent Partnership will enable more young people with SEND to secure meaningful employment and improved life chances. The aim is to support young adults to become more independent and economically active so that they no longer require the additional provision of an EHCP. A future focus will be placed on strengthening transitions across the partnership between children's and adult services including adult social care and health services. Since 2023, a working group set up by Adult Social Care, but with engagement from education and children's social care has been established to improve the experience of children and young people with SEND and their families as they move from children's to adult's services. BPCF and the Youth Forum will both be involved in any re-design of services, as well as the materials created to explain processes to service users and those who care for them, with an increased focus on ensuring the full accessibility of these materials to all of Brent's diverse community.

Managing Service Demand

3.2.27 In March 2022, the Council recognised the need to increase the capacity of the team supporting children with an EHCP given growth in demand for assessments. The team also includes a dedicated SEND Resolutions Officer to meet the requirement for mandatory mediation meetings that are expected to be a key outcome of the new statutory duties arising from the Improvement Plan. This improved efficiency is made clear in the team’s performance against the statutory requirement to issues an EHCP within a 20-week timeframe. The team’s 20-week data, which now sits at 81% for the calendar year to date – far exceeds the national average figure of 50.3% and shows a marked improvement on the team’s performance in previous years. The 0-25 SEND team’s performance against the 20-week key performance index (KPI) on a month by month basis for the last 2 years is shown in Figure 1 below.

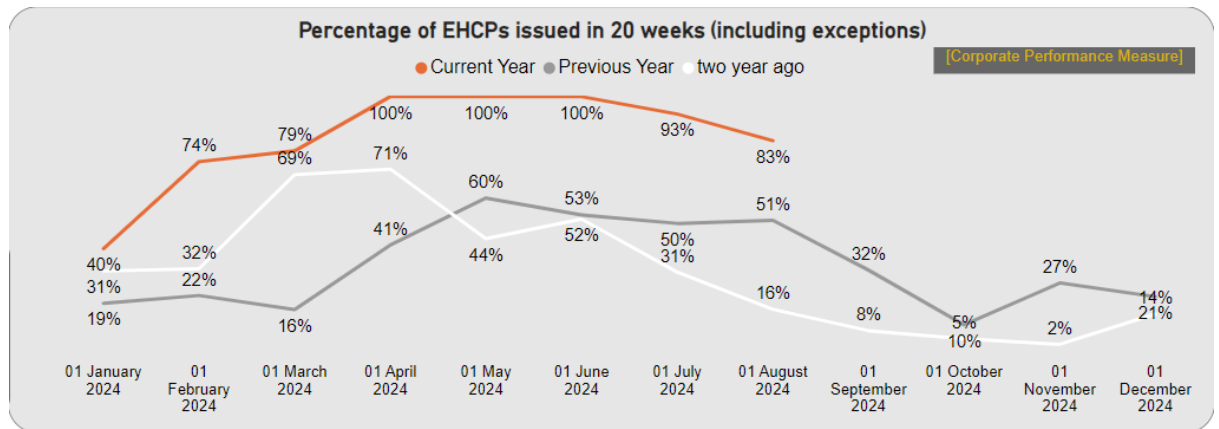


Figure 1: A line graph depicting the 0-25 SEND Team’s 20-week performance data January 2022 – August 2024

3.2.28 However, despite this much needed investment in the SEND team, SEND case officers are continuing to hold 300 cases each (the average in London ranges from 165-325 per case officer) and this presents a potential barrier to case officers being able to case manage effectively (as opposed to simply completing statutory processes). To further support the work of the SEND 0-25 team, further SEND Officers are being recruited as part of the DBV programme, to support the implementation of a new Resource Allocation System (RAS) for children in mainstream settings, early years and Post-16 and to ensure that commitments made as part of the DBV programme do not place further pressure on the SEND 0-25 team.

3.2.29 Continued demand for EHCP assessments, places pressure on both the Educational Psychology (EP) service and SEND case officers. Recruiting for the EP workforce has been challenging with reliance on agency staff, given that there is a national shortfall of trained staff. A Brent recruitment and retention strategy was developed to respond to this and is already paying dividends, with two new main grade EPs due to join the service in the Autumn term 2024. The additional of these EPs will not only mitigate spend on locum EPs but will also support Brent to deliver a more consistent, comprehensive and integrated SEND support offer across Brent schools. Figure 2, below, depicts the number of EHCPs issued by Brent on a month basis for the last two years. Figure 2 shows that, on average, the number of EHCPs issued by Brent have been higher in 2024 on a month-by-month basis than they have been in the two preceding years, demonstrating the sustained pressures on the 0-25 team and the educational psychology service.

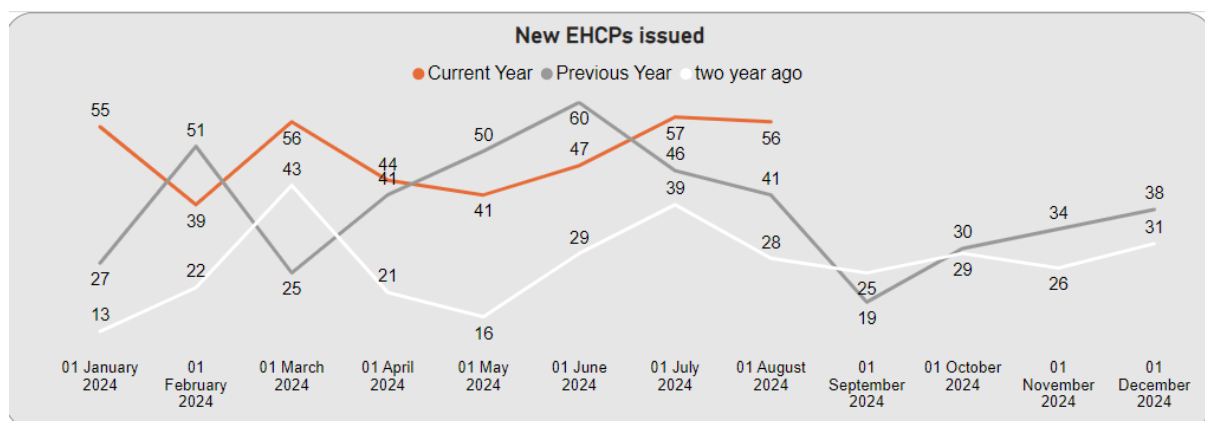


Figure 2: A line graph depicting the number of EHCPs issued by Brent on a month-by-month basis, January 2022 - August 2024

3.2.30 Steps have also been taken to improve collaboration with families to enable a better experience of the SEND system through improved transparency and shared decision making. The Head of Inclusion meets every month with representatives of BPCF and attends BPCF meetings. Additionally, there are bi-monthly ‘meet the leaders’ workshops, which the Director of Education, Partnerships and Strategy attends twice a year. The agenda of these workshops is set by parents and the actions followed up reflect their concerns and priorities. Additionally, all council departments such as Brent Hubs work with the Brent Parent Carer Forum (BPCF) to shape the offer for families with children with SEND. At a case management level, BPCF has worked with the SEND management team to draft template letters to families and annual review documentation. BPCF co-produced Brent’s new EHCP template (due to come into use September 2024) and guidance notes, both containing a clearer focus on the voice of the child and preparation for adulthood (PfA) goals in response to feedback from children and young people with SEND and their families. In the last month, feedback from BPCF has shaped practice in the 0-25 team around communications, with a particular focus on ensuring that parents and carers receive confirmation that, for example, emails have been received, and clarity around when responses can be expected. Additionally, Brent’s new travel assistance policy was co-produced with BPCF.

Quality Assurance of EHCPs

3.2.31 The multiagency quality assurance and performance framework continues to be effective and identifying areas for improvement. In the 23/24 academic year, multi-agency audit of EHCPs revealed that of the 16 plans audited across the year (4 per quarter), 8 were rated as ‘Good’ and 8 were rated as ‘Requires Improvement (RI)’. The majority of plans rated RI were rated RI for reasons relating to quality of comments from social care colleagues (with, for example, comments lacking sufficient detail); action is being taken to address this issue. A regular EHCP QA report explores in full detail where practice needs to improve, with the direction of travel in terms being broadly positive: in the 1st quarter, 3 plans were graded as ‘RI’ and only one was good, whilst by the 4th quarter, 3 plans were rated as ‘Good’ with elements of ‘Outstanding’ and only one plan was graded as ‘RI’. For the 24/25 AY further refinement to the EHCP QA process is proposed, with external LA colleagues from Harrow being invited to join the QA process to ensure a broad and balanced analysis of plans.

- 3.2.32 Parents/carers and young people regularly provide feedback on their satisfaction with services and the Inclusion Service review tribunals and complaints to understand if there are any recurrent themes in the issues raised that require a systemic response. As a result, guidance has been developed for officers on how to ensure that all processes and procedures and how decisions are made are clearly articulated; a new EHCP template has been developed (launched August 2024) developed with input from BPCF and increased training is planned across professional groups on ways to meet SEN need.

SEND Support Services

- 3.2.33 Services and systems are designed around the needs of children and young people to achieve the principles in the SEND Strategy.

Within Early Help, a neighbourhood model of service delivery is established in Brent through Family Wellbeing Centres (FWC) that deliver services in the community and, building on this model, health partners are developing paediatric and health focused hubs. FWC staff have been trained as SEND navigators to help parents access the support they need. FWCs offer a range of co-located multiagency and multi-disciplinary services for children and young people with SEND. From April 2022 to March 2023, 456 children and young people with an identified disability were registered with a FWC, 160 of whom were under 5s, 158 were 6–11-year-olds, 120 were 12–18-year-olds and 18 were 19–25-year-olds. From April 2023 to March 2024, 578 children and young people with an identified disability were registered with a FWC, 181 of whom were under 5s, 192 were 6–11-year-olds, 167 were 12–18-year-olds and 38 were 19–25-year-olds.

Within Education (Inclusion), since July 2024, the SEND Support Services have been placed under the management of a new 'SEND Support Service manager' post. This is a new position and a new structure for education focused SEND support services in Brent. The new structure is designed to make access to SEND support services more straightforward for providers, and to ensure consistently joined up working between teams. The Council outreach teams for autism, early years intervention, portage, deaf and visual impairment services, SEND support services as well as the intervention first team and the inclusion support teams all now sit under the umbrella of 'SEND Support'. Initial feedback for internal stakeholders has been positive, with colleagues reporting that it is now easier to e.g. know who to contact for which service. Feedback from external services will be gathered via the SENCo forum once we are further through the academic year 24/25. The SEND Support services will work to ensure consistent application of the GAF (see 3.2.16, above) in all Brent schools, as well as deliver training to upskill Brent's education workforce (see 3.2.16 and 3.2.17, above for further details of Brent's training offer for schools).

- 3.2.34 Below is a snapshot of feedback on some of Brent's SEN Outreach Services:

Brent Outreach Autism Team (BOAT)

BOAT is a mainstream school advisory service that has been developed to support staff working with autistic children and young people, and their families. BOAT supports CYP up to the age of 16 years or up to 19 years if the CYP attends a mainstream sixth form.

For the academic year 23/24 888 students were known to BOAT ranging in age 2-19yr and 38% (337 students) were actively supported through advice / support and training for their settings. This increased in the 23/24 academic year with 1036

students being known to BOAT ranging in age 2-19yrs and 37% (383 students) of these students being actively supported through advice / support and training for their settings.

In 22/23 195 requests for involvement were received following diagnosis. In 23/24, 310 requests for support were received. Of the requests for service following diagnosis received in 22/23, 30% of those requests were for nursery aged children. In 23/24, the percentage was 42% of the requests, showing a shift towards growing need in the early years.

Feedback for the service is consistently positive, with some examples below:

"I wanted to take a moment to express my heartfelt thanks for the exceptional support and collaboration during our partnership. Your expertise and dedication were crucial to our success, and it was an absolute pleasure working with you." (SENCO)

"BOAT are a diamond in Brent. I really appreciate you taking the time out of your very busy schedule to share some extremely valuable advice." (Family support worker).

"I just wanted to provide some feedback on the Fathers First event that my husband attended this morning. It was excellent, really useful, and previously, there haven't been many similar events specifically for Dads. Both Carol and Clare were excellent in terms of providing advice and support. He also took part in the raffle for a sensory box at Wembley Stadium for the England vs Belgium game and won tickets!" (feedback from Fathers group that BOAT spoke at).

Early Years Inclusion Support Team (EYIST)

Brent EYIST is a service that provides support to professionals and families who are supporting children aged 0-5 for whom a concern about their development exists. The service works with both maintained and private settings. From September 2024, the portage team will become part of the EYIST to promote closer working between these services. The work EYIST undertakes to promote timely intervention and support for children aged 0-5 is in line with Brent's strategic commitment to early intervention to ensure improved outcomes for children and young people.

In the 23/24 academic year, the EYIST supported 521 children within the PVI sector, childminder settings and in nursery classes of maintained schools for the full duration of the academic year. In addition to these children, 134 further children received support for part of the year but then either moved away from Brent, left EY provision or made maximum progress and no longer needed/met criteria for EYIST involvement and so cases were closed in-year. This is a slight decrease on the comparative figure of 538 in the previous academic year, likely to be due to embedding of the Early Years Graduated Approach Framework and ongoing skilling up and effective training of the early years sector to support more children at a universal level of support. This provides evidence that Brent's investment in training for educational providers is having impact.

Satisfaction surveys are completed annually in July. These are to obtain the views of parent/carers, setting SENCOs and receiving schools at the point of Primary transition. Feedback on the service has been positive, as evidenced below:

- *I was always able to ask for help and advice when I needed it. I was never made to feel like I couldn't* (Parent/Carer feedback)
- *The EYIST were always on time. They came when their supposed to come see my child and they were serious in their work to make sure the child gets the right support* (Parent/Carer feedback)
- *We always been super supported by (EYIST) and value the advice given. We know we can always reach out and often receive positive feedback from X about the support we provide for children and early identification of SEN'S. Personally, I think Brent is the most effective and supportive borough for families and children with additional needs.* (Setting SENCO feedback)
- *I would love to say a big thank you to (EYIST) as X is the most dedicated person in what she does. Always giving the best advice and answering our inquiries promptly and efficiently. We are deeply grateful for the continuous support.* (Setting SENCO feedback)
- *You are the only borough that have done transition calls with us, this is really helpful and builds a good relationship with parents, school and nurseries* (out of borough receiving SENCO at point of Primary Transition)
- *The support and knowledge provided by (EYIST) are indeed crucial during children's transition periods. (EYIST's) work emphasises the profound effect that thoughtful educational support can have on student outcomes, highlighting the importance of essential guidance in pivotal moments of a child's development. Thank you.* (Brent receiving SENCO at point of Primary Transition)

In addition to the direct work with early years providers and children and their families, EYIST has worked closely with other professionals around the government funded Start for Life programme and embedded quality improvement across the sector to ensure that young children with SEND are a central consideration of early years work. In the upcoming academic year 2024/25 there are a number of priorities for the team, including:

- Focus on closer collaboration with professionals to ensure effective school place planning for the Reception intake.
- Review of portage service delivery to ensure maximum impact on the youngest and most complex children with additional needs in the borough as well as smooth transition into early years education provision.
- Implementing a banding system for children known to EYIST in order to ensure optimal early years support to children and settings prioritised by need.
- Ongoing focus on promoting approaches that are positive about neurodiversity across the Brent EY sector. First EY SEND specific Brent conference is planned for 12th October.

Alternative Education Provision

- 3.2.35 There is effective oversight of the placement of young people who cannot settle in mainstream in alternative provisions, including in Brent's Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) Brent River College, and in Ashley College, Brent's medical PRU. The local authority also works closely with Roundwood School and Community Centre – an alternative provision free school with wraparound youth offer, established in 2019. A panel oversees the referral and placement process for the 6-day statutory exclusions timeline and for health needs provision.

- 3.2.36 To improve decision-making for children with health needs, a separate panel was established in September 2023 that combines education, health, and care specialists to oversee the placements of children with medical needs. Since introducing this new panel, decisions based on health needs have been made with greater coherence and consistency, with specialist insight ensuring children and young people are receiving education regardless of need. Furthermore, as a result of this panel, schools have been better supported to ensure that they are delivering a suitable offer for children and young people.
- 3.2.37 To ensure that Brent children who are not currently attending school (because they are receiving home tuition, or are being educated otherwise than at school (EOTAS) are not further disadvantaged, from November 2024 a scheme will start whereby families of children who are eligible for free school meals in Brent will be able to receive supermarket vouchers to enable them to purchase food for their children at an equivalent value to the cost of a school dinner. It is hoped this scheme will go some way towards reducing the vulnerability of this cohort and ensuring that Brent is fulfilling its statutory duties towards all children, regardless of where they are accessing their education.

Areas of current focus for further improvement of SEND services

- 3.2.38 The priority since the pandemic has been strengthening earlier intervention and the quality, impact and experience of the SEND system. While progress has been made, there remain areas that require further enhancement:

- Improving commissioning of support for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs in Brent. 56% of children and young people with an EHCP in Brent have 'Communication and Interaction' as their primary area of need, with a significant number of children with an EHCP having SLCN as a secondary or tertiary area of need (though this data is not currently formally collated). In addition to children with an EHCP, Brent has a higher proportion of children receiving SEN support identified with speech, language and communication needs as compared to national (29% compared to 22%).

Currently, the contract that the LA has with the commissioned provider (CLCH) to deliver SALT is insufficient to cover the number of children requiring SALT support. This is leading the LA to spend on spot-purchasing of SALT support. It is hoped that a borough wide approach to SLCN can be developed with engagement from Health, Public Health, Early Help and Education services over the next two years. In the intervening period, a new specification for statutory provision is currently being developed to ensure the contract to minimise the need for spot-purchasing of support. Work is ongoing with the SEND Support Service to redesign the SLCN support offer available to schools and early years providers.

- The implementation of the neurodevelopment pathway for the assessment of conditions such as autism spectrum condition, which will require the joint commissioning and delivery of targeted and specialist support with the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP)/ Integrated Care Board (ICB) and into adult services remains a priority. A primary focus is on addressing the neurodiversity assessment waiting lists and establishing effective interventions. Since 2022, wait times for neurodiversity assessments have come down from an average of 36-48 months to the current wait time of 18-24 months which is a significant improvement, though for Brent's families and children a wait of e.g. 20 months for assessment is still too

long. This improvement in wait times for neurodiversity assessments is attributable to the ICB now using Mental Health nurses to complete assessments, thus increasing the staff pool available for this work.

It should be noted that Brent currently has no Health commissioned service for neurodevelopmental assessments for children and young people aged 5-8, with CAMHS currently covering this gap. Concerns have been escalated with Health partners by the LA, given the rising pressures on this service and the already considerable wait times for assessment. For example, 302 children under 5 were on the waiting list for a social communication assessment (SOCA), with the average waiting time at 87 weeks in Q1 2023/24.

- The partnership is continuing to work on implementation of the Thrive Framework so that there is a 'no wrong door' policy for young people with mental health and emotional wellbeing needs. A focused workshop is being held on 19th September to confirm gaps in the current Thrive system, with a focus on early identification and intervention services to prevent escalation to specialist CAMHS. This would address current waiting lists for services (currently an average of 2 years wait across all areas). There is a need to secure additional appropriate investment in clinical services through the ICB, as Brent remains underfunded compared to other North West London boroughs. 54% of young people were seen by 4 weeks (for initial assessment) and there were 394 young people waiting for CAMHS treatment, with an average wait of 2 years (Q1 2023/24). Concerns regarding wait times have been escalated to the ICB and we are currently awaiting details of the proposed resolution.
- Ensuring vulnerable children and young people are more effectively supported across the partnership in school attendance and improving oversight and transparency of pupil movements in relation to alternative provision. A particular focus for the 24/25 academic year will be on ensuring that Brent is maintaining an effective database of all students registered as Elective Home Education (EHE) and Educated Other Than At School (EOTAS) so that the borough can ensure effective safeguarding of these cohorts.
- A dedicated Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for SEND to inform joint commissioning requirements has not been developed. Brent's current JSNA dates from 2019 and thus stands in need of updating building on a recent SEND Needs Assessment document produced by Public Health in 2023.
- Improved sufficiency of special school places within Brent (see 3.2.20, above).

The areas for improvement identified above have been identified as priorities by the local area partnership. Progress is tracked in the Inclusion Strategic Board (reporting to the Children's Trust).

Brent's SEND Inspection History

- 3.2.39 The last full SEND inspection of the Brent local partnership by Ofsted/Care Quality Commission (CQC) was in 2017 when a written statement of action was required to deal with some identified weaknesses. The area was revisited in 2019 when it was confirmed that all areas requiring improvement had been addressed. The area partnership is therefore anticipating an inspection visit from CQC and Ofsted in the near future. The inspection will provide the opportunity for the area partnership to

demonstrate how it is meeting the expectations contained within the area SEND inspection framework.

3.2.40 In the SEND area inspection framework, a local area self-evaluation (SEF) describes the impact of local area practice and sets out plans to ensure continued service improvement. It is important for each local SEND partnership to have a regularly reviewed and updated SEF for SEND services. The SEF and supporting action plan will not only be requested ahead of a full inspection as previously, but it will also be required for new annual engagement meetings with Ofsted and CQC and for any monitoring activity. This means that Brent SEND partnership needs to have a current SEF and action plan in place. The Brent SEF was last completed in January 2024 and will be kept under review pending notification of an inspection. Brent's last annual engagement meeting with Ofsted took place in February 2024.

3.2.41 Three key questions for the local area partnership are to be covered in the SEF:

- a) *What do you know about the impact of your arrangements for children and young people with SEND?*
- b) *How do you know what impact your arrangements for children and young people with SEND are having?*
- c) *What are your plans for the next 12 months to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND?*

High Needs Block (HNB) Current Position

3.2.42 At the end of 2023/24, the overall DSG deficit in Brent, which had risen due to the increasing number of children with EHCPs funded through the HNB, reduced to £13.2m, following an in-year surplus of £0.6m. The surplus was mainly driven by underspends against the Schools, Central and Early Years Blocks of the DSG offsetting a £1.4m overspend against the HNB. The Early Years Block underspend was mainly due to the DfE's in-year adjustment to the EY Block funding in July 2023, following the completion of the January 2023 census. The EY Block is a self-contained block based on headcount and therefore there is a risk that the DfE may claw back the funding following a final in-year adjustment expected in July 2024.

3.2.43 There was an increase in the number of children requiring EHCPs which was 3,576 as at March 2024 compared to 3,309 as at March 2023, an increase of 8.1%. This led to a £1.4m pressure against the HNB mainly linked to an increase in the top-up funding for in-borough mainstream academies and special schools, placements in independent day special schools and alternative education for children awaiting placements as well as the post-16 provision.

Table 1	HNB Funding £m	Recoupment £m	Total HNB Funding after recoupment £m	Year on year % Increases	HNB Overspend £m	Overall DSG (Surplus)/ Deficits £m
2024/25	85.0	(9.3)	75.7	3%		
2023/24	82.2	(8.8)	73.4	10%	1.4	1.4
2022/23	74.7	(8.2)	66.5	13%	(0.3)	(0.3)
2021/22	66.4	(7.6)	58.8	10%	5.3	4.6
2020/21	60.4	(7.4)	53.0	7%	6.2	5.6
2019/20	56.3	(7.2)	49.1		3.8	4.9

HNB Cumulative Deficit:	16.2
DSG Other Blocks Surplus 23/24:	(3.0)
Overall DSG Cumulative deficit:	13.2

3.2.44 Table 1 above shows the funding allocated to the HNB of the DSG increasing over the period 2019/20 to 2024/25. On average, the funding gap had been in the region of c£5m per annum and this had created a year-on-year deficit of £15.1m by 2021/22. There has been significant investment against the HNB to mitigate further pressures.

3.2.45 Local authorities with deficits are expected to have in place a Management Plan to mitigate their deficit balances. Brent's Deficit Recovery Management Plan includes longer-term actions to recover the deficit and regular updates on progress are presented at Schools Forum. The plan includes a combination of recovery actions including managing demand by applying a graduated approach to reduce the need for an EHCP, improving sufficiency of places by establishing more SEND provision in the borough, improved financial management and anticipated government funding increases expected to mitigate the deficit. The risk remains that the number of EHCPs will continue to rise.

3.2.46 The management plan is updated as part of the budget monitoring process and presented at 2 out of the 4 Schools Forum meetings each academic year. Table 2 below summarises the indicative cost avoidance of the actions identified in this report where quantifiable.

Table 2	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Indicative Cost Avoidance	£0	£0	£0
In year Forecast (Deficit)/Surplus *Unmitigated* forecast	(2,494)	(6,399)	(10,533)
Managing Demand			
- EHC Plans ceased to maintain	400	400	400
- Impact of the Graduated Approach	193	208	223
Improving Sufficiency of places			
- New secondary special school	465	598	701
- ARPs and Special school expansion	1,042	1,664	993
- Alternative Provision			110
- Post 16 skills resource centre			100
Financial Management			
- Realign DSG funded SEN support services			
- 5% Administrative charges	77	82	87
Total Indicative cost avoidance	2,176	2,953	2,614
Net Revised Forecast	(318)	(3,446)	(7,919)
Cumulative Forecast Deficit 2024/25 – 2026/27:			(11,684)
Carried Forward DSG deficit 2023/24:			(13,257)
Forecast Cumulative Deficit 2026/27:			(24,941)

- 3.2.47 The increase in SEND places in borough will lead to a reduction in out-of-borough placements and placements in independent non-maintained special schools.
- 3.2.48 With regards to financial management a lens has been placed on how funding from the HNB is used, including a review of areas that should be funded through other means such as the council's general fund account. In addition to this, the Children's Trust will receive a report on the health needs offer between the ICP, Public Health and the CYP Inclusion Service to confirm the jointly commissioned system wide approach to meeting needs.
- 3.2.49 Part of the management plan includes increased income from a 0.5% transfer (£1.3m) from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. This was approved by the Schools Forum to support the HNB in 2024/25 and it is assumed that this request will continue in future financial years to support the pressures in the HNB.
- 3.2.50 Brent Council, as other local authorities, continues to lobby central government for funding increases, which properly match the levels of need via the Society of London Treasurers (SLT) and London Councils, with the Deputy Leader of the Council actively engaged in the lobbying process.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 4.1 The Lead Member for Children, Young People and Schools is regularly updated on matters related to SEND services.
- 4.2 Sections 3.3.12 to 3.3.33 include examples of stakeholder engagement, including Brent Parent Carer Forum, parents and children and young people to inform service developments.

5.0 Financial Considerations

- 5.1 Nationally the pressures against the HNB have led to local authorities accumulating deficits of about c£3.2bn as at June 2024. The School and Early Years Finance Regulations 2021 agreed a statutory override which enabled local authorities to carry forward any cumulative DSG deficit to be held in a separate reserve. This arrangement was due to end in 2022/23, but the previous government extended the arrangement for another three financial years from 2023/24 to 2025/26. It is not yet clear whether the current government will further extend the override.
- 5.2 As reflected in Table 2 above, the current Brent Management Plan assumes that the deficit is likely to grow with the unmitigated forecast reflecting a funding gap leading to a pressure of £0.318m in 2024/25 and £24.9m by 2026/27. This modelling is based on DfE guidelines with a rate of growth in HNB funding of 3% in 2025/26 and in 2026/27. The 3% funding increase in 2024/25 was the lowest increase the HNB had received compared to previous years and was significantly lower than the cost of inflation. The increase has not been sufficient to accommodate the inflationary pressures that schools and independent non maintained special schools have been facing.
- 5.3 The Management Plan also assumes an average 8% growth in the number of EHCPs in 2025/26 with a 1% reduction in future years, a 6% increase in the costs for placements made in Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools and a 6% increase in staffing costs for 2025/26 with a 1% reduction in future years.

- 5.4 The working assumption is that the indicative cost avoidance in Table 2, which ranges from £2.176m in 2024/25 to £2.614m in 2026/27 would reduce the funding gap, and that if the Schools Forum/Secretary of State continues to agree a 0.5% Schools Block transfer which equates to c£3.9m over three years, the gap would reduce further. However, this will not be enough to secure a balanced in year position and the mitigated cumulative deficit would grow to £24.9m. The potential cost avoidance arising from the DBV programme of £2.1m, will reduce the deficit further to £22.8m.

In summary, if the number of children and young people with EHCPs, which is the main cost driver of the deficit, continues to grow and additional HNB funding is not provided in line with the growth and inflationary pressures, the deficit will increase. Also, if the historic deficit is not cleared by 2025/26, there may be a risk to the Council's General Fund balances.

6.0 Legal Considerations

- 6.1 The Department for Education (DfE) leads the SEND system for England and defines the legislative, policy and funding arrangements. The DfE's vision is of "children and young people with SEND achieving well in their early years, at school and in college; finding employment; leading happy and fulfilled lives; and having choice and control over their support." (DfE 2015b). The current arrangements for the education and care of children and young people with SEND are governed by the Children and Families Act (2014). Part 3 of this requires local authorities, schools and academies, early years providers and NHS bodies to pay regard to the regulations and to the statutory Code of Practice for SEND (DfE 2015a). Duties in the Children and Families Act (2014) include:

- To work across the local authority and health to jointly commission services that deliver integrated support for children and young people with SEND aged 0-25, including arrangements that support personalisation and personal budgets.
- For the local authority to work with local partners, parents and young people to co-produce and publish a Local Offer of SEND services and to assist young people in finding employment, obtaining accommodation and participating in society.
- For the local authority to provide co-ordinated education, health and care needs assessments for children and young people aged 0 - 25 and issue education, health and care (EHC) plans.
- For NHS clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) to put in place mechanisms to ensure practitioners and clinicians can support the integrated EHC needs assessment process.

- 6.2 The Care Act (2014) sets out duties local authorities and CCGs must fulfil for children and young people with disabilities and their families, including direct payments and supporting transitions to adult care services. The Government holds the local SEND system to account through Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) who have been tasked to carry out evaluations of local areas in England and their support for children and young people with SEND. Inspection teams assess the effectiveness of the local organisations in identifying and meeting the needs of all children and young people with SEND from ages 0 to 25 (Ofsted 2016).

7.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 Pursuant to s149 of the Equality Act 2010 (otherwise known as the Public Sector Equality Duty). The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7.2 Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.

7.3 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. This paper demonstrates activity that positively supports the Council and the local area partnership in meeting this Public Sector Duty and actions that aim to ensure anti-discriminatory practices are in place.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 The SEND Strategy 2021-2025 supports children and young people to remain in their local communities and engage positively within their communities. Expanding SEND provision in Brent will reduce travel to schools out of the borough and as a result will have a positive impact on the carbon footprint. The development of Welsh Harp as an environmental education centre supports the Council's climate change strategy.

8.2 Brent's support for Independent Travel Training as part of the new Transport Policy (approved by Cabinet in June 2024) should serve to increase the use of public transport by children and young people with SEND in Brent, thus reducing emissions resulting from reliance on taxis.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

9.1 Clarity on the duties arising from any new legislation will indicate the impact on human resources.

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 Reports on the readiness of the local area SEND Partnership are regularly shared with Cabinet, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Executive of the ICP and Brent Children's Trust Board.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People