



Developing and sustaining an effective local SEND system

A practical guide for councils and partners

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Introduction

The context and aims of this project

In recent years, there has been an increasing public focus on the nature and quality of support provided to children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND). It is a certainly a welcome development that public debates, in both policy circles and the media, are increasingly considering how effectively services support children and young people with additional needs. Often, however, these debates centre on the challenges that local services face in providing the right support at the right time. From our discussions with local councils and their partners through this project, and our wider work with local areas across England, there was a strong view that local areas are feeling considerable pressure and facing significant challenges in providing the support needed by young people with SEND.

The aims of this project are not, however, to detail those challenges. In part, that is because other pieces of work have been undertaken or are underway that are seeking to describe and evidence those challenges, and to influence the way in which they might be redressed. (For example, we are carrying out a parallel research project commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA) to detail the nature of the funding pressures on local area's resources for children and young people with SEND and high needs.) In part, this is because there is also an important role for a complementary piece of work, which takes the current system and its challenges as they are. This project seeks to consider what partners in local areas can do *at the level of the local system* to establish and sustain effective practice in identifying needs, providing support, using existing resources to best effect, and achieving the best outcomes for children and young people with SEND. In much of our work on SEND and inclusion, we often find local areas contending with a similar set of challenges. Furthermore, in many of the local areas with whom we have work, we have come across effective initiatives and projects to address those challenges. Often, however, there are few opportunities for leaders from local areas to come together to share promising approaches to addressing common challenges.

For this reason, the LGA commissioned Isos Partnership to undertake a project to work with local councils and their partners to:

- a. draw together what partners in local areas have done to develop and sustain effective, system-level approaches to supporting young people with SEND;
- b. from these approaches, distil some key practical messages that could be used by partners in local areas across the country, adapted to their local circumstances and priorities; and
- c. share, develop and refine these key messages formatively and iteratively through co-productive discussions with leaders from local areas across the country.

How we have approached the project

Throughout this project, the emphasis has been on learning from some of the practices that strategic leaders and partners in local areas have developed to support young people with SEND. We have approached the work in two distinct phases.

In **phase one**, we facilitated three workshops for:

- a. officers and elected members from local councils;
- b. partners from voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations working within local areas on SEND, facilitated by colleagues from the Council for Disabled Children (CDC); and
- c. national decision-makers and policy-formers from the Department for Education (DfE) and the LGA.

The aim of these initial discussions was to draw together an initial set of key messages about effective practice in establishing and sustaining a good local SEND system.

In **phase two**, we facilitated a series of six regional workshops for elected members and officers from local councils to share and spread these messages, but also to refine them and gather additional examples of effective local approaches. In total, members and/or officers from 63 councils have contributed to this project. This report summarises the key messages and some of the examples of effective practice that we have taken from these discussions.

The scope of the project

The scope of the work has been a broad one: when we refer to SEND, we are referring to children and young people (referred to as ‘young people’ throughout this report for brevity) aged from birth to 25, and those supported at the level of SEN support as well as those with statutory Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs).

Throughout this report, we also talk about the concept of a “local SEND system”. We use this term to refer to the arrangements, relationships, support, services and provisions that relate to SEND within the local area covered by a local authority.

Because of the breadth of the scope of this work, we have found it helpful to structure our discussions with council colleagues and partners around six broad themes. These themes capture the key relationships in an effective local SEND system – recognising that SEND is a partnership endeavour, and ensuring effective support is not within the gift of any one organisation. These themes also cover the continuum of SEND support, ranging from what is offered in mainstream and universal settings, to more targeted services, and through to specialised provision. The six themes are as follows:

1. partnership working and co-production with parents and carers, and with young people;
2. strategic partnership working and joint commissioning across education, health and care;
3. identifying, assessing young people’s needs and ensuring they can access the support that they need;
4. building inclusive capacity in mainstream schools and settings;
5. developing responsive, flexible and effective local specialist provision; and
6. preparation for adulthood.

In this report, we have used these six themes to set out the key messages about SEND good practice that we have taken from our work with the councils and their partners who have participated in this work.

About this report

This report has been written as a concise, practical summary of good practice in developing and sustaining an effective local SEND system. It has been written with the intention that this will be of use to elected members and officers in local councils, but equally to local strategic partners in clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and local health services, schools, early years settings and colleges, groups and networks of parents, carers and young people, VCS organisations and others with an interest in ensuring that there is effective local support for young people with SEND.

As we have noted at the outset of this introduction, the aim of the project has not been to explore the nature of the challenges faced by local SEND systems, but the practices developed by local areas to develop practices that are effective in mitigating those challenges and providing support for young people with SEND. A strong message from council colleagues throughout this project has been that the key messages and practices captured in this report are not a panacea that will allow local SEND systems to avoid challenges and pressures all together. Instead, they are necessary steps in seeking to provide support, meet needs, ensure effective use of local resources and achieve good long-term outcomes for young people with SEND in what they considered a highly challenging context.

We are grateful to all of the councillors, officers and partners from local areas, as well as colleagues from national organisations such as the LGA, CDC and DfE, who have engaged with this project, shared examples from their work, and helped to shape this document. We hope that the messages we have captured through this project offer useful, practical ideas that can inform the work of leaders and partners in reflecting on and strengthening practice within their local SEND systems.

Summary of key messages

Theme 1: Partnership working and co-production with parents and carers, and with young people

- **Demonstrate commitment to sharing challenges and solving problems in a spirit of co-production.** Ensure that co-production feels meaningful, and not tokenistic, by engaging at a formative stage, openly sharing a problem and enabling parents, carers and young people to generate ideas and shape solutions.
- **Empower and enable local groups of parents and carers to play a strategic role within the local SEND system.** Identify specific opportunities for parents, carers and young people to influence the local SEND system at a strategic level and build the capacity of local groups and networks to play this role.
- **Focus on broadening participation by engaging an ever-wider range of young people and families.** Make broadening participation, and hearing from as broad a range of parents, carers and young people as possible, an explicit aim of the local SEND system.

Theme 2: Strategic partnership working and joint commissioning across education, health and care

- **Develop and embed strong routines and processes for making decisions and commissioning provision across key agencies.** Ensure that there are explicit processes and protocols – about decision-making and the use of resources – that are used to consider commissioning of individual packages of support and overall services.
- **Ensure joint commissioning delivers better, joined-up support by planning pathways of support for specific types of needs.** Identify key areas of need – autism or mental health – and plan a coherent, seamless pathway of support for young people and their families.
- **Put in place effective governance structures and processes to ensure strategic decisions can be taken swiftly and effectively.** Whatever the make-up of council and CCG boundaries, ensure that there is a clear partnership governance structure in place that enables partners to make joint strategic decisions swiftly and effectively, and use existing governance mechanisms (such as the Health & Wellbeing Board) to ensure that there is an appropriate focus on support for young people with SEND.

Theme 3: Identifying, assessing young people's needs and ensuring they can access the support that they need

- **Focus on strengthening core processes and building a consistent understanding so that needs can be identified early and accurately (and the right support put in place).** Central to this is having a widely understood and consistently applied vocabulary for identifying a young person's needs (not for its own sake, but as a first step to putting in place the right support).
- **Ensure that information about local support is accessible and helps families and professionals to navigate the local system easily.** Part of this is about ensuring that the local offer is a useful tool that enables families and professionals to understand what is available, which services are best placed to support them, and how to access those services. Part of this

is also about ensuring that there are mechanisms for local services to respond flexibly in instances when a young person requires a more bespoke package of support.

- **Put in place open, transparent and outcomes-focused processes for assessing young people's needs.** Ensure that assessment processes take a holistic view of a young person's needs while also identifying the support that is needed, and that decisions are taken in an open, informed and transparent manner.

Theme 4: Building inclusive capacity in mainstream schools and settings

- **Ensure that there is a clear strategy for building inclusive capacity in mainstream schools and settings.** This will require there being a set of consistent expectations about the support mainstream settings and schools will offer, but also a clear offer of support to build their capacity to deliver this support effectively.
- **Ensure that schools and settings have access to an explicit offer of targeted inclusion support.** Be clear what targeted support can be accessed, what will be part of a "core" offer open to all schools and settings (without requiring a statutory assessment and plan), and where there is an additional offer that settings and schools can tap into by using their own resources.
- **Ensure that inclusion support provided by education services is part of a broader, holistic and joined-up offer of support for young people's care and health needs.** Recognise the importance of supporting a child's needs in their education setting, but also that those needs may be linked to issues related to their family, home or health needs that will require joined-up support from a wider range of non-education-based services.

Theme 5: Developing responsive, flexible and effective local specialist provision

- **Work with local specialist providers to develop robust routines for considering local needs and shaping local provision to meet them.** Developing an evidence-informed and collaborative approach to planning places in specialist SEND provision – both the state-funded and independent / non-maintained sector – so that there is an effective, collective plan for how local provision can meet local needs.
- **Develop a range of "mainstream plus" options.** This will include working with local mainstream and specialist providers and developing models for meeting young people's needs in learning environments that match their educational and wider developmental needs, and allow them to remain connected to their local communities.
- **Develop collaborative processes for considering bespoke placements for young people with the most complex needs.** This will involve bringing local specialist providers together to work collaboratively to consider how they could develop bespoke packages of support to enable young people with the most complex needs to be supported in their local communities. This will also entail developing strategic and effective commissioning of placements in the independent and non-maintained sector, including working collectively with neighbouring local areas.

Theme 6: Preparation for adulthood

- **Be pro-active in gathering feedback from young people about their aspirations and use this intelligence to commission pathways that will enable young people to pursue their goals.**

Engage young people who are likely to require further support or bespoke pathways to pursue their aspirations, and convene local education providers and wider partners to shape corresponding pathways.

- **In parallel, pro-actively engage local employers, and support them to develop opportunities for young people with SEND to make a successful transition to the world of work.** Take an incremental approach to working with local employers (in the private or third sectors, but also in the public sector – including the local council and health services) to develop pathways for young people with SEND to move into the world of work. Help employers to understand the needs of the young people with whom they will be working and to put the right support in place. Use this learning to show other employers how this can be done as well as the benefits of employing young people with SEND.
- **Ensure that there is a strong, joint local offer of education, health and care options to enable young people with the most complex needs to make a successful transition to adult life.** Ensure that there are effective processes for early planning of a young person's transition to adult life, as well as enabling agencies to work together to put in place holistic packages of support that will enable a young person to thrive in adult life.

Chapter One: Partnership working and co-production with parents and carers, and with young people

Why this matters in local SEND systems

Co-productive relationships are at the heart of local SEND systems. The nature of young people's needs and the fact that the SEND system spans a child's early years, their statutory school age, and their early adulthood means that there will often be several agencies, services and organisations involved in supporting a young person and their family. Getting it right for a young person with SEND, let alone across a local system, is not within the gift of any single organisation or body. As such, a key focus of the national SEND reforms (following the Children and Families Act 2014) and work within local systems since then (as we describe in the next chapter) is around local partners working together to ensure the local SEND system delivers effective support and achieves good outcomes for young people.

The principles of partnership working apply across all aspects of the local SEND system, and none more so than in work with parents and carers, and with children and young people. The importance of partnership working and co-production – working with those involved with or affected by something to find shared solutions – have been a strong theme in the local area SEND inspections carried out by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). In their 2017 summary of the themes from the first year of local area SEND inspections, Ofsted and CQC stated, *'typically, where strategic co-production has been most successful, the local area's parent and carer forums have sought and used the views of parents to inform their discussions with leaders and their role in co-production.'* The comments from one local area's inspection report highlighted the importance of effective partnerships with parents and carers.

'In [the local area], local area leaders and [the parent and carer forum] have established strong and effective working practices. The forum draws on its members, keeping them informed of meetings, consultations and imminent changes in provision using a range of social media and other devices. This means that parents are represented at all partnership meetings between leaders in education, health and care.'

'Local area leaders are clear about and sensitive to the impact of decisions and changes on families. They take this fully into account when planning strategically for the future. Parents feel valued and part of the improvement planning for provision in the city, including understanding the reasons why decisions are taken.'

In this chapter, we highlight three key messages, drawn from our discussions with council members and officers, as well as from VCS organisations, about how to establish and sustain effective co-productive relationships with parents, carers and young people.

Demonstrate commitment to sharing challenges and solving problems in a spirit of co-production

The colleagues we engaged through this research described two contrasting approaches to working with parents, carers and young people. The first they described as co-production in name only. This approach was characterised by councils and other agencies working in a traditional way, spotting a

problem, working up a solution, and then “consulting” a group of parents or young people as if to “tick the co-production box”. They described such an approach as tokenistic. There was no attempt to ensure those affected by a problem or decision could take ownership of this, and limited opportunity to shape the eventual outcome.

By contrast, the second approach, and one of more genuine co-production, was based around sharing a problem at an early stage, fostering shared understanding of the issue, and solving the problem through collaborative and formative discussions. This involved being committed to working in a different way, as well as a high degree of mutual trust. Several local areas with whom we worked described how, as a first step in building a culture of co-production, council officers and parent and carer groups had worked together to develop some clear principles and protocols defining what co-production meant and how each would seek to work in a co-productive way.

Having an explicit “co-production charter” can be useful, both as a reference point, but also as an initial project on which to test out and start to develop a more co-productive culture of working between the council, partner agencies and parents, carers and young people. Ultimately, however, co-production has to move on from being something new and discrete to being part of the culture of the local SEND system. Particularly for councils and partner agencies, which by their nature will be large and multi-faceted organisations, the challenge will be ensuring that the principles of co-production are embedded and applied in all work that concerns young people with SEND and their families. As one council officer put it, ‘co-production must be everyone’s business and it must be routine.’ As such, some council colleagues who contributed to this project described how they had developed a co-production tool, that enabled services and providers, including schools, to assess themselves in terms of their co-productive working with families.

Fostering a culture of co-production in Durham

A big focus of Durham’s work around the local SEND system in recent years has been on developing and embedding principles of co-productive working between the Council and local parents and carers of young people with SEND. To build on this, and ensure these principles and practices are applied consistently across the local SEND system, Durham has developed a participation strategy and corresponding “co-production benchmarking tool”. The tool has been developed by Making Changes Together (MCT), the Parent Carer Network, with support from Durham County Council. MCT engaged a wide range of parent groups, and children and young people to learn of their experience highlighting the barriers to effective co-production and also where co-production has been enabled. This is designed to be used by individual services, settings, schools and colleges, in order to ensure that there is consistently effective co-productive working with parents and carers, as well as young people, in the work of all services and providers. This has been particularly important in ensuring that parents and carers are involved in informing, shaping and strengthening system-wide initiatives and the work of individual services – for example, working with schools to shape a clear offer for pupils at SEN support. The Local Area Quality Improvement Board has committed all local area partners to completing a benchmarking exercise about their current coproduction practice and, in six months’ time, to reassess their position following implementation of the strategy.

Furthermore, council colleagues noted that, even where it was done well, co-productive working was often undertaken by one agency acting alone – the council may engage some co-productive working with parents and carers, while a local health service engaged in a parallel piece of work. Colleagues

noted that there would be value in looking at opportunities for multi-agency co-production. Some local areas that contributed to this project discussed how they were exploring opportunities to do this when re-designing specific support pathways in which several agencies were involved – for example, support for young people with autism or mental health needs, which we describe in more detail in chapter two.

The final aspect to developing a culture of co-productive working was to show that co-production could deliver tangible benefits. Colleagues emphasised that it was important to avoid a scenario in which engagement was undertaken, feedback gathered and expectations raised, and then parents, carers and young people heard nothing about what had happened. One way of demonstrating the benefits of co-productive working is to be able to point to specific improvements in support or services. Several local areas had developed routines for updating parents, carers and young people through “you said, we did” features on their local offers. As council colleagues emphasised to us, however, in some instances, issues may take longer than anticipated to be worked through, potential solutions delayed, or challenges found to be more difficult to overcome. A crucial aspect of co-productive working in these instances is to keep the dialogue going with parents, carers and young people – to ensure those with whom agencies are working are kept informed about the process by which an issue is being worked through and have an informed understanding of what will be required to see it through to its conclusion. To complement the “you said, we did” approach, some local areas had added to this with a “you wanted, we have not been able to” feature, so that there would be complete openness and transparency between councils, partners and local families.

Reshaping the offer of short breaks with parents and carers in Nottinghamshire

In 2016, Nottinghamshire decided to review the county’s offer of short breaks for parents and carers of children with disabilities in partnership with the Nottinghamshire Parent Carer Forum (NPCF). What was then the current offer had been in place for several years, but the Council recognised that, with rising demand and increasing pressure on available resources, the offer in its then form was not sustainable. The Council wanted to co-produce a new offer with parents and carers.

As a first step, the Council held a series of consultation events across the county together with an online survey. While part of the challenge was about the pressure on Council resources, parents had a strong interest in ensuring that there was a fair and equitable offer of short breaks for families across the county. The County Council, the NPCF and parents / carers formed a co-production working group. The co-production working group then worked together to agree an overall offer that was affordable, sustainable and met the principles that parents had put forward. These included the offer being fair, the criteria for accessing support being transparent, and there being some level of support available to all families who needed assistance.

As such, rather than keep the offer the same but raise the eligibility threshold, parents and the Council co-produced an offer that rebalanced the level of support but ensured there continued to be some form of short break offer for all parents and carers that had been eligible under the previous model. Council officers reflected that, as a result of working co-productively with parents, Nottinghamshire had been able to develop a new short breaks offer that was not necessarily what the Council would have developed had they been working on this alone, and was seen by parents as being fair, transparent and sustainable. The new offer went live in September 2018.

Empower and enable local groups of parents and carers to play a strategic role within the local SEND system

Mutual challenge is an important part of the relationship between parent and carer organisations and councils and partner agencies. Feedback about things that have not worked is an important source of intelligence and, when used appropriately, can help to identify broader issues and drive improvements across a local SEND system. The risk, however, is that relationships characterised mainly by challenge can become wholly adversarial in ways that can impede partnership working and co-production. This is not to underplay some of the challenges of the local SEND system experienced by families, but rather to recognise that there are important practical steps that can be taken by local partners, including parent and carer groups, to ensure that these experiences can be used to improve and strengthen the local SEND system.

In our discussions, council colleagues described the importance of seeking to build a partnership with parent and carer organisations in which the latter had and was able to play a strategic role in ensuring the local SEND system worked effectively for all local families. There are two parts to this. The first is identifying specific opportunities for parent and carer organisations to play this role. Some local areas had done this by commissioning the local parent carer forum (PCF) to design or deliver a specific service. One local area, for example, had commissioned the local PCF to deliver an information and advice service to parents and carers, with parents offering impartial advice and support to others seeking to understand and navigate the local SEND system. Another example came from a local area where the PCF had been tasked with designing a programme of training and support for parents and carers of children who had been diagnosed with autism, enabling those families to understand their child's needs and how best to support them. Common examples were of parents and carers being part of project or task-and-finish groups, helping to co-design a service, improve the local offer, or develop a set of guidelines for mainstream schools around effective engagement with parents of children with SEND. Overall, what is crucial is identifying opportunities where a new way of delivering support or service is required, and framing this as an "ask" of parents, carers and/or young people to come up with new ideas.

Strategic co-production with parents and carers in Wiltshire

Wiltshire's Parent Carer Council (WPCC) represents around 2,500 parents and carers of young people with SEND across the county. Council leaders and WPCC colleagues have sought to develop a strong strategic partnership whereby parents and carers are at the heart of strategic decisions and can play an active role in new initiatives relating to the local SEND system. There are two ways in which they do this.

First, the Council and WPCC have sought to ensure that there is a clear and formal agreement about how they will work together. This covers basic, but fundamental, things like how the Council and WPCC will consult one another and share intelligence, and even how and when meetings will be held – simple things, but crucial to ensuring the relationship works smoothly. WPCC has good links with political leaders and senior officers, including the Leader of the Council and Director of Children's Services.

Second, the Council has recognised the need to support and empower WPCC to play a strategic role in the local SEND system. As a result, the Council has used funding to invest in building the capacity of WPCC to provide some key local services. Funding enables WPCC to employ five members of staff – a Director, Chair of Participation, and three Information Officers.

- **Information and advice** – WPCC is funded by Wiltshire Council to provide a dedicated information and advice service, run *by* parents and carers *for* parents and carers. This has a separate, but complementary, focus to the local SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS). WPCC's service has been running since 2011, and is designed to signpost parents and carers to the correct services and enable services to join-up in the right way, rather than parents and carers being referred between different services. This has a practical benefit to Wiltshire's families, but also provides a valuable source of feedback and intelligence for WPCC and the Council.
- **Participation** – WPCC receives funding of £30,000 to foster participation among parents and carers. This enables WPCC to cover travel expenses and overcome other barriers to parents engaging in consultations and other events. This is crucial in a county the size of Wiltshire. As a result, attendance at workshops for parents are very good.
- **Support in Wiltshire: Autism Parent Programme** – WPCC were commissioned and now run a bespoke set of age-specific programmes for parents of children with autism. WPCC have worked with parents to develop an information pack and the content of the courses so that these are responsive to local needs. The programme is now co-run by parent-facilitators, who have been through the programme and can share their experience to support other families.

As one senior Council offer put it, 'our work with WPCC is part of a whole-system approach. There is nothing we do that does not involve WPCC. The decisions we have taken have always been better because they have been properly informed. The process of making what have been some very tricky decisions has been made so much easier because we have a good, honest and trusting working relationship. We can say with a high degree of confidence that we know what works and what doesn't work in our services.'

The second part of enabling parents, carers and young people to play a strategic role in the local system is to build their capacity to take on this role. What this entails will depend on the specific "ask". Where local areas were asking the local PCF to take on a particular function (delivering an information and advice hotline), it had been important to support the PCF in developing the core processes to support delivering this service. Where the "ask" had been around designing a particular form of support for other parents or an offer of support, councils had supported parent and carer groups by providing an initial induction into the service area and the broader context in which that service operated so that any solutions generated were likely to be successful. Council colleagues stressed to us the importance of putting in place some agreed expectations in advance. This was not done to dampen aspirations, but rather to ensure that there was clarity about what to be achieved, over what timescale, and with what level of resources.

Council colleagues noted that it required an investment of time and in some instances a small amount of resources to support parents and groups to play a more strategic role within the local system, but considered that this investment returned considerable benefits over time. First, this can help to strengthen relationships between parents, carers and the council and its strategic partners. Working co-productively can mean that new initiatives are seen as having been developed openly and through partnership, and presented not as something the council is *doing to* families, but as something that families and the council (and other partners) have developed together. Second, such an approach can result in better decisions and solutions, with co-productive working having the potential to generate

new ideas that had the broad backing of a wider group of parents, carers and young people. Third, such an approach can provide the impetus to broaden the reach and strengthen the structures of local parent and carer groups – for example, becoming formally constituted, being in a position to deliver services, and with leadership and governance structures in place that can help to avoid groups becoming dependent on a small cadre of committed volunteers.

These principles apply equally to co-productive working with young people. Council colleagues argued that it was important to foster among young people the expectation that they would be involved in shaping decisions about their lives from a young age. Colleagues emphasised the importance of building opportunities for young people to express themselves, what they found helpful and not, and their aspirations into the process of assessing a young person’s needs and planning their support – both at school or setting level for children on SEN support, as well as through the statutory process for those who may need or have EHCPs. Asking young people what they wanted, what would help them, how they found a particular experience, how it could be improved, was seen to be valuable in itself. Council colleagues also emphasised that doing so could help to lay the foundations for more structured, strategic engagement with young people on specific, system-wide, co-productive projects.

Focus on broadening participation by engaging an ever-wider range of young people and families

Formal groups of parents and carers, such as the local PCF, and likewise area-wide young people’s groups often rely heavily on a cadre of committed individuals who dedicate significant amounts of their time on a voluntary basis. This commitment is to be applauded, and in many areas is a strength of the local SEND system. Nevertheless, council colleagues emphasised that, when seeking the views of parents, carers and young people, it was important to ensure the wide range of voices and perspectives within a local area were heard, as well as to avoid expecting groups like the PCF to speak on behalf of all parents and carers. In particular, local areas noted that there was often a wider network of parent and carer or young people’s groups based around very specific localities or arranged around common sets of needs. These groups often provide vital support networks, but potentially can also be an important set of partners when seeking to engage parents, carers and young people in a spirit of co-production.

Parent champions in Manchester

In Manchester, parents and carers have been empowered to support one another in getting to grips with and navigating the SEND system. Three years ago, feedback from local engagement exercises and through the local offer team and SENDIASS suggested that parents valued being able to gather information about SEND support and services from a range of sources, but particularly valued being able to ask questions from other parents. In response, Manchester worked with interested parents to set up a programme of “parent champions”, where parents are given training in understanding the local system, using the local offer and SEND information reports, how to access local support and how to give feedback on gaps in provision.

To fulfil the role, parent champions simply have to be available to have conversations with other parents of children with SEND and to help other parents access Manchester’s local offer. Many have taken a much more pro-active approach organising information, support and engagement events within their local communities. So far, over 100 parents have been trained as parent champions.

Feedback from those parents who have been trained and those who have been supported by the parent champions has been extremely positive.

The parent champions complement the strategic work being undertaken by Manchester Parent Carer Forum and together are making sure that parents and carers are key partners in improving services for children and young people with SEND.

Furthermore, council colleagues noted that it was often the families of children with EHCPs who were involved with formal consultation and co-production activities, since these tended to be the families who were known to local SEND services. While it is important to gather the views from these families, it is also important to note that the majority of children with SEN do not have EHCPs. They and their families, however, will have experience of the local SEND system. It is important, therefore, that there are opportunities for their feedback to be heard. Some local areas had sought to broaden their engagement by working with schools to reach the parents and carers of children with SEN support, and draw on the feedback from this wider group of parents and carers to identify improvements needed across the local SEND system.

Council colleagues emphasised that it was crucial was to be pro-active in seeking to broaden participation, and to be creative in continuing to find ways of engaging parents, carers and young people who may not necessarily be comfortable being part of formal groups or traditional consultation exercises. In particular, council colleagues highlighted the need to make broadening participation and engagement an explicit aim of partnership working between the council, partner agencies, and existing groups of parent and carer and young people. Some local areas had explicitly commissioned their PCF to broaden participation: part of the agreement between the council and PCF was based around increasing membership and involvement in consultation and co-production activities. Some local areas had put in place practical measures to allow PCFs and similar groups to incentivise membership (such as through offering local discount cards) or facilitate participation (paying for venue hire and transport costs).

A strong message from some council colleagues was to think about engagement with parents, carers and young people less in terms of traditional governance structures and more in terms of “networks”. What they meant by this was to move away from seeing the engagement of young people (and to some extent parents and carers) only in terms of being represented on formal, system-wide governance structures, and more in terms of networks that linked together existing groups of young people. Some of the local areas that contributed to this project described how they had developed specific “co-production co-ordinator” roles, which entailed working with existing groups of young people – in schools, colleges, youth clubs – on specific projects as part of a wider, local area network.

Enabling young people to shape the local SEND system in Cornwall

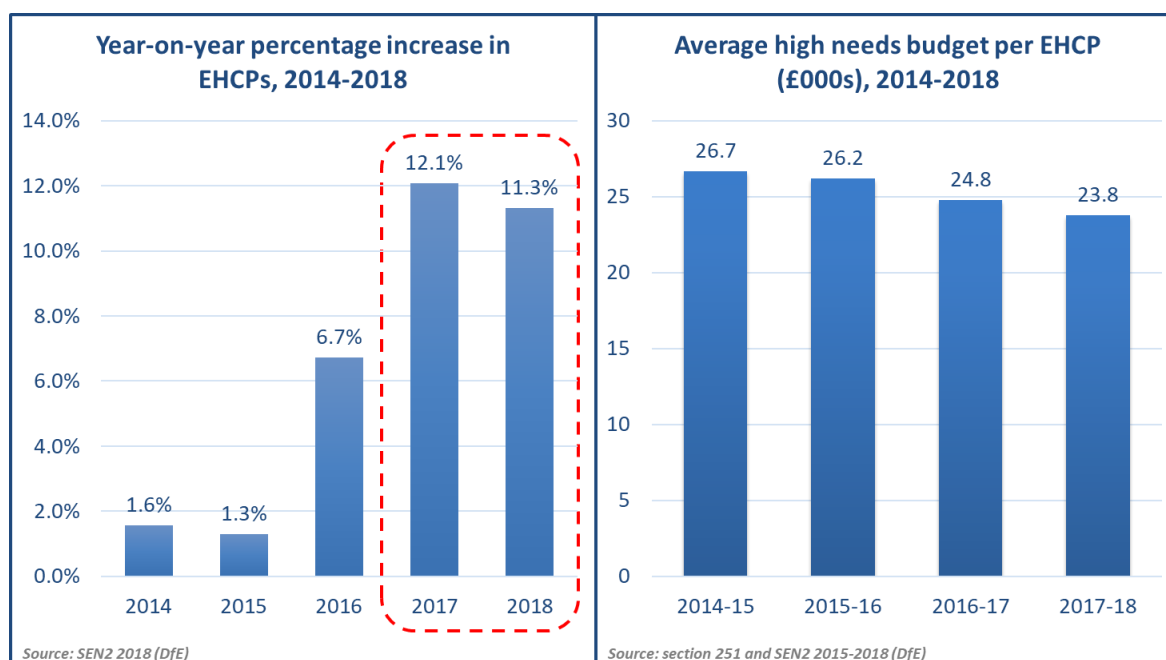
The local SEND system in Cornwall is overseen by a county-wide SEND Strategic Board. There was a Young People’s Board that fed into and, over time, helped to shape the work of the overall SEND Strategic Board. This arrangement has worked well – the members of the Young People’s Board provided challenge to local SEND services and leaders, and developed materials and videoclips for other young people about the local SEND system. Reflecting on these arrangements, however, the Council recognised that the arrangements did not necessarily allow young people who could not easily travel across the county to the Board’s meetings or who might not be comfortable giving their views in a formal meeting to have a voice in shaping local SEND developments. As a result, Cornwall have now moved to a “network-based” approach. The Council has commissioned Young People

Cornwall to offer a facilitation service, going out to existing young people's groups in schools, colleges, youth clubs and suchlike, consulting them on specific "live" issues, gathering their views, and linking them together. The activity still links with the SEND Strategic Board. This has ensured that the voice of young people with a wide range of needs and across different parts of the county are at the heart of decisions made about the local SEND system in Cornwall.

Chapter Two: Strategic partnership working and joint commissioning across education, health and care

Why this matters in local SEND systems

The SEND system is one in which demand has been growing at a faster rate than the resources available to meet that demand. This is a trend that we explore in further detail in our parallel research on high needs funding, which we are also carrying out on behalf of the LGA. The left-hand chart below shows the year-on-year proportionate increases in the numbers of children and young people with EHCPs: there were 12.1% more children and young people with EHCPs in January 2017 compared to January 2016, and a further 11.3% more EHCPs in January 2018 than the previous year. The chart on the right then takes the total high needs block allocations across the country and calculates the average amount available for each EHCP. This is a crude calculation, since not all children and young people supported by resources from the high needs block will have EHCPs. It illustrates, however that the resources available to spend on one of the main groups of young people with high needs has fallen from £26,700 in 2014-15 to £23,800 in 2017-18.



This places a premium on making the best use of all resources within local SEND systems, which in turn requires effective and mature partnership working at a strategic level, but also at the level of providing support for individual young people who may require support from a range of agencies and services. As with the previous chapter, here, we highlight three inter-related practical messages, informed by our discussions about practice in local areas, about establishing and sustaining effective strategic partnership working across the local SEND system.

Develop and embed strong routines and processes for making decisions and commissioning provision across key agencies

Packages of support for young people with the most complex needs will often require input from a range of agencies. An effective local SEND system will have well established protocols and routines

through which decision-makers from key agencies can come together to agree their respective contributions. This will include, first, decisions about packages of support and placements for young people with the most complex needs. Often this will be done through a complex needs placement panel, with decision-makers from health, social care, education and other services. Second, this will also include formal governance arrangements through which decisions are taken about emerging trends, projections of future needs, and the commissioning (or de-commissioning) of specific services. In each instance, what is crucial is there being sign-up across agencies to the protocols and processes through which these decisions are made:

- how decisions are to be taken;
- according to what criteria;
- who has the authority to take decisions; and
- what each agency can and will contribute in terms of support and resources.

As one council offer described in their local area, the having formal protocols in place between local agencies has meant ‘we no longer have the argument about money every time there is a decision to be made.’

Ensure joint commissioning delivers better, joined-up support by planning pathways of support for specific types of needs

As with co-production, an important first step when local partners start talking about joint commissioning is to be clear what is meant by the term and how it will make a practical difference in the local system. One of the ways local areas have sought to translate aspirations about joint commissioning into tangible activities has been to focus on specific support pathways. Often, these have been pathways that will require the input of different agencies and services. Common examples include autism and social, emotional & mental health (SEMH) needs, and early support for children in their early years, which will require input from a range of health, care, education and wider support services.

In these instances, commissioners have thought about a type of need not from the perspective of what services are available currently. Instead, they have considered how the pathway of support for a young person with a specific need would look from the perspective of the young person and their family, regardless of which agency is responsible for providing that support. They have asked whether the local system is able to articulate clearly a seamless offer of support, in terms of what support is available, at what level, what should be accessed at what point, and what the route is to accessing that support. They have also considered together what available evidence and intelligence can tell them about current and future needs, what outcomes they want to achieve for children and young people with SEND in the local area, what services would be required to achieve those outcomes, how that matches what is available currently, and how those gaps could be addressed.

Often, local areas have looked at their local offer, and used this as a tool for testing whether the current offer of support can be presented in this way. If not, they have used this as a prompt to consider where there are improvements needed in how the offer of support is presented and appears to families, or whether there are gaps in the pathway of support itself.

Key ingredients to developing an effective approach to joint commissioning highlighted to us included:

- **aligning key sources of data and intelligence** in the form of a joint dataset on children and young people with SEND (which may underpin the local area’s Joint Strategic Needs

Assessment), so that partners can take decisions about joint commissioning based on a broad and shared understanding of current and future needs;

- **having an agreed set of outcomes** that partners are seeking to achieve together through the services that they commission;
- **being clear on the resources required** to meet current needs and achieve agreed outcomes, and what each agency will contribute;
- **bringing together frontline practice as much as possible**, integrating services where possible but also doing simple things like organising joint training for staff across different agencies and ensuring that there is a common language and a consistent approach to support young people with SEND and their families across all agencies; and
- **pulling all of this together in the form of a genuinely joint strategy**, developed by agencies together, rather than being developed by one and on which other agencies are consulted later – this is another instance of the importance of applying the principles of co-production to relationships across the local SEND system.

Put in place effective governance structures and processes to ensure strategic decisions can be taken swiftly and effectively

The last key message for establishing and sustaining effective strategic partnership working highlighted by the colleagues we engaged in this project related to governance structures. Effective partnership governance is crucial to providing an overall framework in which partnership activities can take place. Colleagues emphasised that these structures, such as strategic SEND boards, the Health & Wellbeing Board and the Children’s Trust Board, helped to provide the authority for partners to take decisions together and the mandate to work together on key partnership projects. They also noted the way in which elected members and senior officers could play their role as champions of young people and families by asking questions, providing informed challenge, and ensuring that there was an appropriate focus on support for young people with SEND within these partnership fora.

Colleagues also emphasised the importance of seizing partnership opportunities, such as the development of local initiatives based around *Future in Mind* (focused on mental health) or establishing local sustainability and transformation plans (STPs). Several local areas stressed the importance of using an Ofsted and CQC local area SEND inspection, both the preparation and response to the inspection feedback, for partners to consider the strengths of their partnership working and the areas that need to be strengthened.

Colleagues noted, however, that different local areas contain different configurations of council and CCG boundaries. In some, the council and CCG are coterminous – one council and one CCG cover the same area. In others, however, there can be a large council (usually a county council) covering a geographical area within which operate several CCGs. Conversely, there are areas where one large CCG covers an area made up several individual councils.

Whatever a local area’s make-up, the argument from council colleagues was that it was crucial to have a formal governance structure in place that was as integrated as possible so as to enable joint decisions to be taken swiftly. Local areas had developed a range of ways of creating such structures. Some local areas had created integrated commissioning functions – leadership roles and teams – across the LA and CCG. Others had created parallel commissioning posts, so that there was one lead for the council and one for the CCG with responsibility for commissioning SEND services. In local areas with multiple

CCGs, what had often been put in place was a single commissioning lead / hub, who was responsible for working with, representing and taking decisions on behalf of the CCGs within the local area.

Local areas were, however, keen to note that the strength of partnership working varied across local areas, and that these could be dependent on local context, respective priorities and personalities. Colleagues highlighted a number of ways that they had used to strengthen partnership working where this had not been strong. These included:

- using local area SEND inspections as an opportunity to assess and strengthen partnership working across the local area, and secure commitments to developing certain areas of the local SEND system that require input from partners;
- find a “guiding coalition” of key leaders across agencies who are committed to improving the local SEND system and find ways of engaging them by couching key priorities in the language of their services and outcomes, and using this to create a mandate for working differently across the partnership;
- using this “guiding coalition” of senior leaders where necessary to help overcome blockages and escalate governance issues – for example, if there are barriers to making decisions in a key SEND partnership board, being able to raise the issue with the senior leadership and governance of the CCG or NHS Trust;
- empowering young people, parents and carers to articulate where they see the need for support and services to be improved, including developing groups of “young commissioners” who can provide insights into how services are working and can help to co-produce new ways of delivering those services.

Council colleagues also highlighted the vital role that an effective designated clinical officer (DCO) and/or designated medical officer (DMO) could play in helping to bring together input from local health services. They argued that it was worth investing significant time in building the relationships between the DCO / DMO, lead SEND officers and a range of key partners within local education, care and health services. They saw the strength of these connections as being crucial to finding both quick solutions and drawing together key partners on system-level strategic pieces of work.

Strategic partnership working in Bath & North East Somerset

In Bath & North East Somerset, there is a strong history of partnership working between the Council and local health services. These have received a renewed focus since the creation of CCGs – in Bath & North East Somerset, the Council and CCG are coterminous for the commissioning of children’s services and support – and since the introduction of the SEND reforms in 2014, with a specific emphasis on integrating functions and services where doing so would be beneficial in terms of local support for children. The Council has a Director of People Services, covering both children’s services, adult service and public health, who leads a fully integrated management structure across the Council and health services. There is specific focus on bringing together commissioning functions to create more effective, holistic and responsive local services. The Council is in the process of fully integrating the remainder of the CCG’s commissioning functions into the council to deliver a joined-up approach across adult services.

At an operational level, there are strong joint working practices relating to the EHC assessment process and a well-established joint agency panel for deciding on support for young people with the most complex needs requiring multi-agency support. Staff from the Council and health services have completed SEND leadership training together, and are using this as an opportunity to develop a joint local quality-assurance framework for SEND services. Leaders from both services have

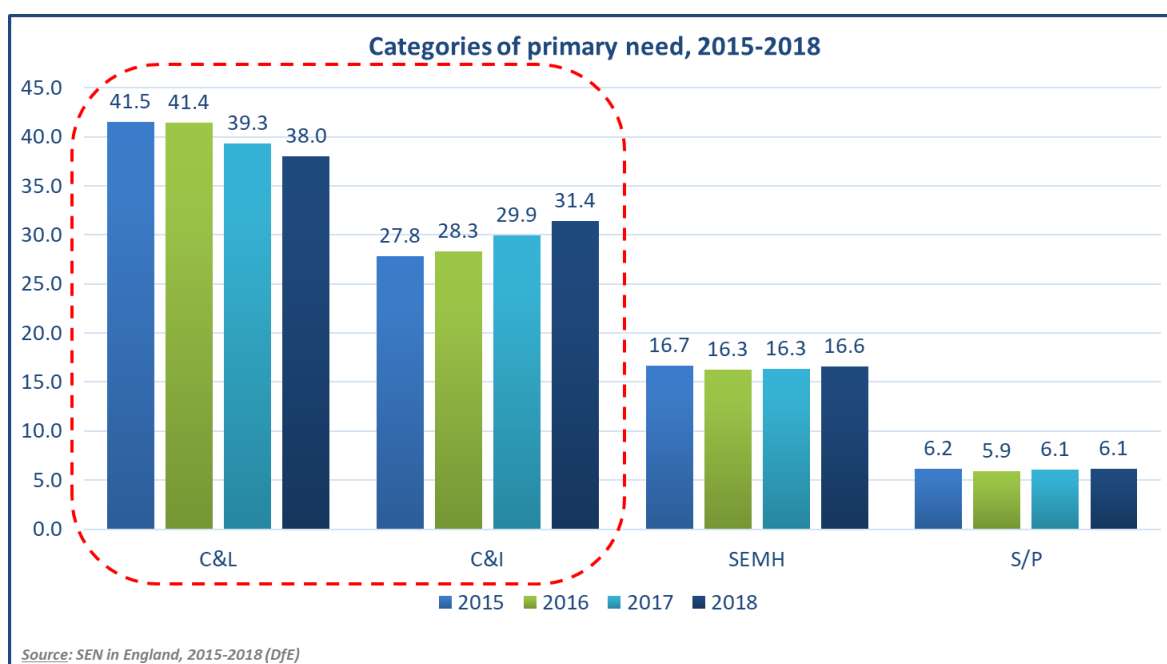
recently worked jointly and with schools to develop a new set of descriptors for allocating high needs funding, a new policy for supporting children with health-related needs and a graduated approach to SEND in schools in Bath & North East Somerset. Overall, well-established decision-making structures, strong strategic governance and effective on-the-ground relationships and practice help to ensure that partners can work together on shared priorities within the local SEND system.

Chapter Three: Identifying, assessing young people’s needs and ensuring they can access the support that they need

Why this matters in local SEND systems

Ensuring that young people with SEND get the support that they need when they need it requires that professionals working across the local system are able to identify needs early, accurately and consistently. For many young people and their families, as well as for frontline professionals working with them, frustrations occur when needs are not picked up early or when there are barriers or delays to accessing support – or, as we describe in subsequent chapters, when there is not the right offer of support within the local SEND system.

In addition, the needs of children and young people with SEND are, by definition, changeable. It is often commented on that young people’s needs are becoming more complex, with advances in medical science and societal factors combined with more sophisticated identification of need. This is undoubtedly true, but is also in the nature of local SEND systems. Over time, the local system needs to be able to support the needs of young people that were once considered new and complex. The challenge is to ensure that all services across the system are able to develop their practice in identifying and build their capacity to meet those needs.



At a very high level, the chart above shows how, over time, there has been a shift in the identification of needs of young people with SEND. The chart is based on the reported primary need of school-age children in England. As such, it provides a useful, but partial, picture of children’s needs – it does not capture further needs or combinations of needs, and, as we go on to explain, it can mask some inconsistent approaches to identifying and categorising a child’s needs. It shows that, over time, there has been a reduction in the proportion of children with a primary need related to cognition & learning (C&L), and a rise in those with a primary need related to communication & interaction (C&I), which includes autism. The proportion of children with SEMH as a primary need has remained relatively stable, although many colleagues highlighted that, beneath these figures, the definition of this

category of needs was changed by the 2014 Code of Practice to include mental health more explicitly. The proportion of children with sensory and/or physical needs (S/P) has remained relatively stable during this period. We highlight these trends here so as to underscore the importance of local SEND systems having a shared understanding of and practice relating to the identification of needs.

Focus on strengthening core processes and building a consistent understanding so that needs can be identified early and accurately (and the right support put in place)

Much of the work to identify the needs of young people with SEND will be done without recourse to a statutory assessment by professionals working in universal settings – early years settings, schools GP surgeries and so on. Consistently effective identification of young people’s needs is vital to ensuring that young people can access the support they need, as well as to ensuring that data and intelligence on current needs, on which decisions about commissioning services are based, are accurate.

Council colleagues related examples to us of both inconsistent and inaccurate practice – the category of moderate learning difficulties interpreted as meaning “multiple” learning difficulties, SEMH used as a “catch-all” category for young people showing “behavioural needs”, or visual impairment (VI) being listed as the primary need for young people who wore glasses. This reflected varied understanding of certain types of needs, but also an underappreciation of the importance of recording this accurately and the ways in which these data were used by the local system. As such, a key message from the councils that have contributed to this work concerned the importance of putting in place a consistent vocabulary and framework for talking about, exploring and identifying a young person’s needs. The aim here was not to focus on *labelling* young people. Instead, the point here is to ensure both that young people’s needs can be identified early and accurately, as a first step to putting the right support in place, and that the local SEND system can base its decisions about the services it commissions on robust data about current and future needs.

Councils described a range of approaches that had been used to strengthen practice and processes in this area:

- **working with SEN co-ordinators (SENCOs), other SEND professionals to agree a common set of descriptors for talking about children’s needs** – building their understanding of how to identify certain needs and what support is likely to be effective;
- **similarly, organising joint training for frontline professionals across agencies** – education staff, therapists, general practitioners (GPs), health visitors – so that there is a common understanding of young people’s needs across different services;
- **comparing data sources to ensure needs are being identified accurately** – for example, comparing census data on the number of children with a specific primary need with the caseloads of any local SEN support services (e.g. outreach team) for that type of need, and analysing any discrepancies that suggest over- or under-identification;
- **quality-assuring census data on pupils with SEN** – checking that data submitted by schools on the primary needs of pupils with SEN as part of the school census are accurate, and using any discrepancies to work with schools to support them to ensure their practice in identifying pupils’ needs is consistent;
- **ensuring professional oversight of the use of data on primary needs** – ensuring that assessment panels and annual reviews are used to consider what a young person’s current, main barrier to learning might be, and ensuring this is reflected in their plans and support, but

also in data held at system-level so that informed decisions can be taken about commissioning local services; and

- **considering a sample of EHCPs** – to look at the consistency and quality of identification of needs, and whether information is presented in a way that provides the information needed by young people and their families, and by professionals and services.

The last point is an important one: council colleagues emphasised that, in many local areas, EHCPs were an untapped resource. They argued that EHCPs played an important dual purpose: both setting out a young person's strengths, aspirations and the support they would need to pursue their goals, but also, when aggregated together at system level, providing a rich source of intelligence about current and future needs. Some LAs had started to study their EHCPs, or a sample thereof, to glean intelligence about current trends, gaps in support and services, and the sort of sorts of long-term pathways that would need to be in place for young people to pursue their aspirations. Capacity permitting, several council colleagues described how they were planning to make more systematic use of the intelligence that could be drawn from EHCPs to inform how they sought to shape local support and services.

Ensure that information about local support is accessible and helps families and professionals to navigate the local system easily

Often parents and carers, young people and professionals find it frustrating when it is not clear what support is available, what they can access and how they go about doing so. Part of addressing this concerns the clarity of information about available local support. The local offer should be a key source of information and guidance. In some cases, however, the local offer has been constructed as a static directory of services and provisions, which simply lists local services, sometimes with a brief explanation of their role and contact details, without giving any sense how they fit together in an overall continuum of support. This can be helpful if the parent or professional knows which service they are looking for, but can be less helpful where they want to understand what forms of support are available for young people with autism, for example.

As such, it is vital that the local offer is more than simply a directory of services, but operates as a practical introduction to families and professionals about the local SEND system, the overall model and pathways of support that are available, and how and when those can be accessed. In other words, the focus should be on not simply listing all local services, but enabling families and professionals to appreciate how they fit together as a continuum of support and to navigate to the right service. Where local areas have undertaken recent work to strengthen their local offer, they have often sought to consider this from the perspective of young people, parents and carers, or SENCOs and other SEND professionals. In many instances, they have worked in a co-productive fashion with small groups of these stakeholders to test how the local offer works for them and how it could be improved. Two key potential improvements were highlighted to us.

- a. **Setting out an introduction to the local offer based around broad types of needs** – most local offers are constructed around geography (enabling people to search for services local to them) or types of provision (a section on special schools, health services, family support). Often, however, parents and carers, young people or professionals may go to the local offer seeking to understand what mental health support is available, and what the criteria are for accessing different levels of support. Having a way of navigating the local offer according to some broad

types of needs, and providing an overview of the pathway of support for young people with those needs was seen as one way of making the local offer a more useful practical tool.

- b. Introducing the local offer with an overview of the continuum of local support, services and provision** – explaining the make-up of the local system, the roles of individual services and forms of provision, and how these were arranged to meet the needs of young people with SEND in the local system. This might include, for example, explaining the needs that were supported in mainstream schools and settings, the forms of targeted support that were available, the aims and role of resourced provisions or SEN units, and the specialisms of local special schools.

Council colleagues noted, however, that the local offer was never going to be 100% perfect. For instance, some families were more likely to get their information from peers or other professionals – for many families, their first interaction with the local SEND system will be through a discussion with a school SENCO, a health visitor or a GP. This serves to emphasise that the local offer needs to be the reflection of a clear and shared understanding of the local continuum of SEND support, services and provision, not a substitute for it: it no good having a sophisticated local offer if professionals are providing contradicting advice to families about what services are available and how to access them. Many local areas emphasised the importance of having a strong local SENDIASS, able to provide impartial information, advice and support to families in navigating the local SEND system, understanding and seeking to access available support, and interacting with settings, schools, colleges or other services.

Furthermore, there will also be instances where it is not clear-cut which forms of support a young person would benefit from, or where a young person's needs require the input from several services. In these instances, the local offer may not be a complete guide to how to access the right package of support for the young person. Some local areas, recognising this, have developed a single point-of-access to local inclusion and SEND services. Through this, they have been able to say to professionals and parents, "if, having consulted the local offer, you are not clear what support you need, there is a single point-of-access that you can come to and get advice". Often, this will be a way of contacting a SEND professional by phone and/or email and getting advice about available support. In most cases, this approach will cover inclusion and SEND services, but some local areas we engaged described how they were beginning to explore developing multi-agency single points-of-access to SEND services.

Those local areas that had developed such an approach described several key benefits:

- it allows for professionals and families to be signposted to available support – and avoids them feeling that they have been "passed from pillar to post", which is a common complaint;
- where a young person's needs are less clear-cut, rather than individual services saying, "this isn't a case for us", the front door approach puts the onus on the council's services, or indeed the wider partnership, to work together to find a bespoke solution, rather than a school or parent having to attempt to co-ordinate multiple services and partners; and
- the process provides a valuable source of intelligence about requests for support and potential gaps in services, which can, in turn help to inform future commissioning decisions.

Council colleagues argued that, while it did require an investment of time and staff resource to put in place a front door / single point-of-access approach, this approach did not require additional resource, nor did it generate additional needs. Instead, it allowed existing resources to be used more effectively to meet needs that were not being met well within the current system.

A “front door” to SEND service

At the time of the introduction of the SEND reforms, East Sussex County Council wanted to put in place a straightforward process for schools to access inclusion and SEND (ISEND) support and services. At the time, there were inconsistent approaches to inclusion across the county, frustration from schools at the lack of clarity about how to access support, and no formal means for ISEND services to co-ordinate multi-service responses where these were needed. Following consultation with school leaders, the Council developed the idea of having a “front door” to ISEND services: a single point-of-access that would enable signposting to the correct service or identify those cases that required a more bespoke, multi-service response. Colleagues from a range of ISEND services worked together to develop a proposal, which was then further refined and tested with school leaders. The basic process comprises three steps.

1. **Single point-of-contact** – mainstream schools and settings have a single point-of-contact (a phone number and an online form) to go to when they need support. The emphasis is on this process being as simple and swift as possible.
2. **Information gathering** – the front door is staffed on a rota system, with expert professionals (e.g. qualified specialist advisers, teachers or educational psychologists) on hand to provide advice, supported by administrative staff who assist in gathering any necessary information. Schools and settings are then directed quickly to the appropriate service, or further information can be gathered for more complex cases prior to being taken to the decision-making panel. Crucially, there is a set response time, so that schools and settings can be confident in getting a quick reply and being updated as their case progresses.
3. **Panel decision-making** – for complex cases, where the support a school or setting needs does not fit the criteria for any single service, or where more than one service could support the school or setting, information is passed to a panel of service managers who can decide the appropriate bespoke package of support. The number of panel meetings required has actually reduced over time, as more and more cases are being screened out and addressed earlier in the process.

The front door handles around 1,200 requests for support annually. This has an implication in terms of the time staff invest in operating the front door and attending panel discussions, but Council colleagues feel this has been a valuable investment. The front door model enables staff time to be spent offering the opportunity for professional dialogue with between schools and help services to co-ordinate and implement support more intelligently. As the Head of Service put it, ‘Perhaps the most significant implication of this approach is that it shifts the onus from the school or setting having to find the service whose criteria their pupil’s needs fit, to the local authority services to working together to provide a swift, and practical and holistic solution.’

Since the front door launch, inclusion and ISEND has continued to review the paperwork and processes with SENCOs and school leaders to ensure the system is responsive to the changing needs in schools. As well as having a more robust process for accessing support, over the last three years, East Sussex has seen other significant benefits. These include more effective joint working between services due to an improved understanding of individual service specialisms, and an increased appetite in schools to engage ISEND services to maintain a pupil’s placement and ensure that pupil is fully included.

Put in place open, transparent and outcomes-focused processes for assessing young people's needs

The third key message from councils was to ensure that, where the identification of a young person's needs and the planning of their support required a statutory assessment to be carried out, this should be done in a way that was open, transparent and outcomes-focused. They recognised that the way in which assessments were carried out locally needed to balance both ensuring that assessments were holistic, strength-based and meaningful for the young people concerned, as well as ensuring that the assessments were clear in terms of the outcomes sought and what professionals needed to do to achieve those. Council colleagues suggested four key ways in which this could be done.

- a. **Design the assessment process so that it is open, transparent and seen to be fair** – councils described developing clear decision-making criteria, protocols and processes to govern decision-making relation to statutory assessments and plans. A key role was often played by regular decision-making panels. Councils described the benefits of having a formal membership, that involved representation from headteachers, SENCOs, parents and carers, as well as attendance from health, social care services, education-based inclusion services and wider SEND services.
- b. **Ensure that the process makes the best use of colleagues' time and allows for appropriate focus on young people's needs** – a common complaint is that assessment panels often have so many cases to consider that they can struggle to do justice to the ones that require in-depth professional discussion. Some local areas have developed forms of "triage" arrangements, not to avoid panel discussion, but to identify those cases that are likely to require the most in-depth discussion and ensure that appropriate time is spent on those cases.
- c. **Regular analysis of the process** – councils described the importance of considering data on numbers of requests, sources of requests, rates of refusal to assess, numbers of cases considered by decision-making panels and so on, in order to identify bottlenecks or barriers, ensure the assessment system is working as effectively as possible, and identify opportunities where issues could be resolved through better early support.
- d. **A stronger focus on outcomes** – treating EHCPs not only as a picture of a young person's strengths, aspirations and support, but also as commissioning documents with a focus on a clear set of outcomes that providers, supporting the young person, were expected to meet. Council colleagues argued that this could be particularly important in terms of ensuring that all services supporting a young person, from early years settings through school and into further study, were focused on a young person's aspirations, long-term outcomes and their contribution to preparing the young person for adulthood.

Empowering families through personal budget statements in Cornwall

In Cornwall, every child or young person with an EHC plan is offered a "personal budget statement". This provides a comprehensive but accessible summary of the financial resources that education, health and care services are contributing to the support a young person receives. These brief documents are proffered as part of the EHC needs assessment process, and can be requested or updated at each EHC plan review. Council leaders have reflected that this has helped to demystify aspects of local SEND support, services and resourcing, which can often be contentious issues. It has empowered families to understand more about what can and cannot be made available as a personal budget and supports young people and their families to shape the support they receive.

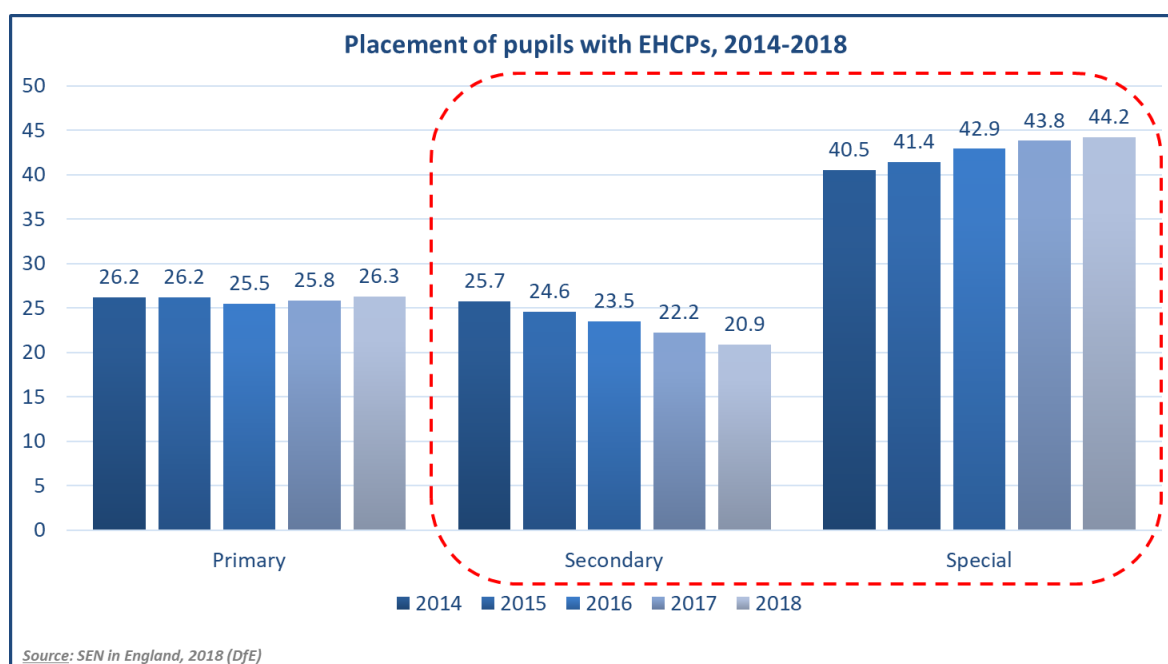
When these were first introduced a frequent response was “I didn’t know you were spending so much”. Most families and young people do not now request a “personal budget statement” but it is readily available to those who do. It is felt that establishing the processes, and continuing to make the information available, has increased trust about the allocation of resources.

Chapter Four: Building inclusive capacity in mainstream schools and settings

Why this matters in local SEND systems

The vast majority of children with SEND will be supported in mainstream settings. Just over 1 in 10 (11.7%) pupils in mainstream schools has an identified SEN and is supported at the level of SEN support. A further 2.9% of pupils have statutory EHCPs, just under half of whom are supported in mainstream schools. Many of those young people with EHCPs educated in special schools and other settings are likely to have spent part of their education in a mainstream school or setting.

As such, effective practice in mainstream settings and schools in identifying young people's needs and putting in place the right support is at the foundation of the local SEND system. Getting this wrong can create unsustainable pressure on more targeted and specialist forms of provision, and can close off opportunities for young people and choices for parents. As the chart below illustrates, national data suggest that proportionately fewer young people with EHCPs are being supported in mainstream schools, particularly secondary schools, and proportionately more are being placed in special schools.



This trend is one that was remarked upon by the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP, in his speech to the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) conference in July 2018.

'We know there has been a steady movement of children with special educational needs out of mainstream schools and into specialist provision, alternative provision and home education. At the same time, rates of exclusion have begun to rise after a period of having calmed down. And I hear too many stories about off-rolling, with schools finding ways to remove pupils, outside of the formal exclusions system. And of what is, essentially, pre-emptive exclusion ...

'And I want to be clear right now: this is not okay. SEND pupils are not someone else's problem. Every school is a school for pupils with SEND; and every teacher is a teacher of SEND pupils. And all schools and colleges – alongside central and local government – have a level of responsibility here,

it cannot just be left to a few. Nor should we forget that a significant consequence of this trend away from mainstream schools into specialist provisions is extra pressure on council's high needs budgets.'

As in the previous chapters, here we highlight three of the ways that councils can help to build inclusive capacity in mainstream settings and schools as the foundation of support for young people with SEND in their local systems.

Ensure that there is a clear strategy for building inclusive capacity in mainstream schools and settings, built on shared expectations and a clear offer of capacity-building support

There are four aspects of putting in place an effective strategy for building inclusive capacity.

- a. **Putting in place clear expectations about what needs mainstream schools and settings will meet** – this is not about defining what a “mainstream child” should be, not least since the differences in the needs that are met by mainstream schools and settings in different areas disproves that idea that there are fixed limitations on the needs mainstream schools and settings can meet. Instead, this is about ensuring that there is broad agreement across the mainstream education providers in a local area about the levels and types of needs that they will commonly be expected to meet from their own capacity and resources, and the point at which it may be appropriate to access additional support. The key point here is not having a fixed boundary, but rather having a shared and consistent agreement about what mainstream inclusion across the local system should look like. It is not straightforward to agree such expectations across a diverse range of schools and settings – early years, primary and secondary, maintained and academies – but pro-active engagement with school and setting leaders and a focus on ensuring equity and consistency of support across a local area is crucial.
- b. **Backing these expectations with a clear offer of capacity-building support** – agreeing expectations is important, but equally important is ensuring that staff in local mainstream settings and schools have access to support that can enable them to translate those expectations into practice. This can be vital both in terms of ensuring consistency of practice as well as offering a form of induction for staff who are new to the local area. This is something that all schools and settings can benefit from, and it can be important to emphasise this when engaging with setting and school leaders, multi-academy trust (MAT) chief executives and other local education leaders. This offer of support need not be provided wholly by the council. Engaging “system leaders” who can play a role in supporting practice beyond their immediate school can be an important way of drawing on the expertise and building capacity across the local SEND system. For example, some local areas described how they had worked with a local teaching school alliance (TSA) to support the identification and designation of specialist leaders of education (SLEs) with expertise in SEND. Colleagues also emphasised that it was important to think about what the “core” offer of support available locally would be, and specifically the role that SENCO networks could play in providing development opportunities for SEND leads in mainstream schools and settings. What is crucial, council colleagues argued, is that the offer of local support is aligned to strategic priorities and the level of inclusion support that is expected of mainstream schools and settings.

- c. **Be responsive in finding out what professionals need** – council colleagues argued that it was crucial to be pro-active in seeking feedback from SEND professionals in schools, gathering information about the support that they and their schools and settings needed, and responding swiftly. Some of the local areas that contributed to this project described how they regularly gathered feedback from SENCOs and used this to inform training, development and whole-school support around inclusion and SEND across the local system.
- d. **Link inclusion support to whole-school improvement support** – key to ensuring effective mainstream inclusion is engaging not just SENCOs, but headteachers, leaders and governors. Council colleagues highlighted the importance of drawing the leadership and governing boards of mainstream schools and settings into discussions about inclusion, and situating this in terms of whole-school improvement support. Council colleagues described approaches that involved gathering together data on individual schools that provide an overall picture of their approach to inclusion. These “inclusion profiles” could include up-to-date information about numbers of children with SEN in the school or setting (compared to what might be expected in schools serving similar communities), data on attendance, profile of pupil’s primary needs, requests for statutory assessments, and the progress of key pupil groups. This data could then be used as the starting-point for targeted discussions and support around inclusion, linked to wider school improvement priorities. This could be particularly important in ensuring that changes in the leadership and governance of local schools did not lead to a significant disruption to local expectations around inclusion. Such an approach could also be used to identify issues in the transition of pupils with SEND from one setting or phase to another.

Building whole-school inclusion capacity in East Sussex

Colleagues in East Sussex undertake regular audits and consultations with SENCOs and school leaders to engage schools in discussions about ISEND services and to gather their feedback. In a recent audit of SENCOs, the vast majority said that they were confident about their own inclusive practice but were less certain that their teaching colleagues had the skills and confidence to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Council leaders collated this feedback and played it back to mainstream schools. As a result, it was agreed to develop a county-wide capacity-building and professional development programme, focused specifically on the areas highlighted as development needs by SENCOs and teaching staff. In response to audits outlined above, CPD in 2018 has included:

- workshops for new to role SENCOs delivered by ISEND service professionals;
- targeted workshops for trainee teachers and newly-qualified teachers on specific areas of SEND; and
- targeted SEND training for class teachers based on an innovative model that includes opportunities to plan and deliver lessons with colleagues.

CPD sessions run through local SENCO hubs have also been established and are becoming embedded across East Sussex. Local SENCO hubs have accessed co-ordinated advice and guidance from colleagues from health services, parent support services and ISEND services – the agenda is set by SENCOs based on current issues experienced in schools.

A lead SENCO Programme has provided a model for building additional capacity for school-to-school support and improvement focused on SEND. Mental health and emotional wellbeing are key areas of focus, and new advisory SENCO role has been created. Part of this role entails delivering bespoke workshops for schools, which have been running during this academic year. The response from

teaching staff has been very positive, indicating that there is a strong desire to develop strategies and approaches for differentiating teaching and support in the classroom, particularly from recently- and newly-qualified teachers. Further work is now being planned to develop an overall offer of whole-school inclusion, with a focus on engaging headteachers / principals and the chief executives / executive principals working across partnerships of schools. Over the last academic year, East Sussex has seen improved outcomes for pupils at SEN support level at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

Ensure that schools and settings have access to an explicit offer of targeted inclusion support

Building on the preceding point, an effective local SEND system has a clear offer of support that can be accessed by mainstream schools and settings at an agreed point and to enable them to keep young people included. Colleagues argued strongly that, if the only way of accessing additional support was by accessing statutory EHCPs, then this was likely to create greater demand for EHCPs. Council colleagues argued strongly that the local system needed to have a mechanism for providing additional support in a way that was not linked to statutory services, and in ways that were more flexible and time-limited. Through this work, we came across examples of local areas having developed processes whereby schools and settings could apply for short-term, time-limited inclusion funding. This could, for example, be used to seek support for a young person with complex needs who had recently moved into the local area, or to deal with a specific issue that required an immediate, short-term intervention. Other forms of support could include advisory support, capacity-building support and direct work with young people. Council colleagues considered that there was not a single best model: developing the local offer of targeted support was likely to depend on the local context, and offered an opportunity for co-production with local mainstream leaders and SENCOs.

As noted above, such support may also come in the form of outreach support, which could be provided centrally or commissioned from local schools, mainstream or special schools. Council colleagues emphasised the importance of ensuring that there was a clear understanding of the role of targeted inclusion support services, how these matched local priorities, the outcomes these services were seeking to achieve, and how leaders of the local system could see if these services were achieving those outcomes.

During this project, we had several good debates about the role of “core” services (those provided for all schools and settings across a local system) and those offered on a traded basis. Colleagues noted that offering some services on a traded basis could be a sensible means of ensuring those services remained available in a local system. Others cautioned, however, that offering inclusion services on a traded basis could mean that children in schools that had not chosen to purchase those services would get less support than their peers in other schools. Colleagues recognised that different local areas would be in different positions when it came to what services they offered as part of a “core” offer to all schools and settings and what was available on a traded basis. What they emphasised, however, was the need to set out clearly what was included within the core offer, and to ensure that this was aligned to the local SEND system’s strategic priorities. They argued that it was important to avoid a situation where there was a mismatch between, on the one hand, the system’s priorities and needs, and, on the other, the support that was available to schools and settings: for example, there being a pressing need to develop mental health support in schools, but not access to capacity-building support

or such support being available on a traded basis and only bought in by a subset of schools and settings.

Developing support for pupils with autism in mainstream schools in Rochdale

Like many areas of the country, Rochdale was seeing a growing number of children with autistic trends and needs relating to communication and interaction. Following discussions with school leaders and SENCOs, SEND leaders at the Council recognised that there was a clear need to build understanding of and confidence in meeting the needs of pupils with autism in mainstream secondary schools. Working together with local secondary schools, Rochdale embarked upon a programme of work the primary aim of which was to build the capacity of the local system to support pupils with autism. In addition, colleagues noted that the programme was likely to have a wider benefit in terms of schools' ability to differentiate support and develop strategies for including pupils with a wider range of needs.

The central aspect of this programme was providing all secondary schools in Rochdale with a budget to test and develop new approaches to supporting pupils with autism. The programme involved staff training, provided by the Autism Education Trust and the Seashell Trust, but was deliberately non-prescriptive: applying the principles of co-production, the aim of the programme was to engender school ownership of their own approaches to supporting pupils with autism. A recent evaluation has shown that some approaches proved more effective than others, but, overall the programme has boosted attendance and reduced exclusions in all secondary schools across Rochdale. Programmes that focused on building capacity of staff (especially teaching staff) and building a suitable environment have been particularly effective in ensuring a culture of inclusion is sustained. Examples of this includes where specialist staff were brought in with the aim to upskill current teaching staff with specific techniques to engage students, or where longer-term bespoke curriculum programmes were developed, or where a physical base for pupils with autism was designed within school. Through these initiatives, additional support (through a named keyworker) for autistic pupils to make the transition from Year 6 to Year 7 and a wider programme of supporting families of children with autism, the Council consider that this programme has been an effective way of shining a light on support for pupils with autism, developing understanding and building inclusive capacity.

Ensure that education inclusion support is part of a broader, holistic and joined-up offer of support of support for young people's care and health needs

As a final point, council colleagues argued that, as well as providing inclusion support in schools and settings through *education*-focused services, it was crucial that the offer of targeted support recognised the way in which a young person's needs in an education setting could be a manifestation of things in their family life or related to their physical or mental health. As such, council colleagues highlighted the importance of joining up the offer of education inclusion support as part of a wider, integrated offer of early help, family support, and targeted support from local health services.

Developing a joined-up offer of early help and family support in Barnsley

Over the last two years, Barnsley have sought to develop a joined-up offer of early help and family support across the borough. A key part of this has been transforming children's centres, with a focus

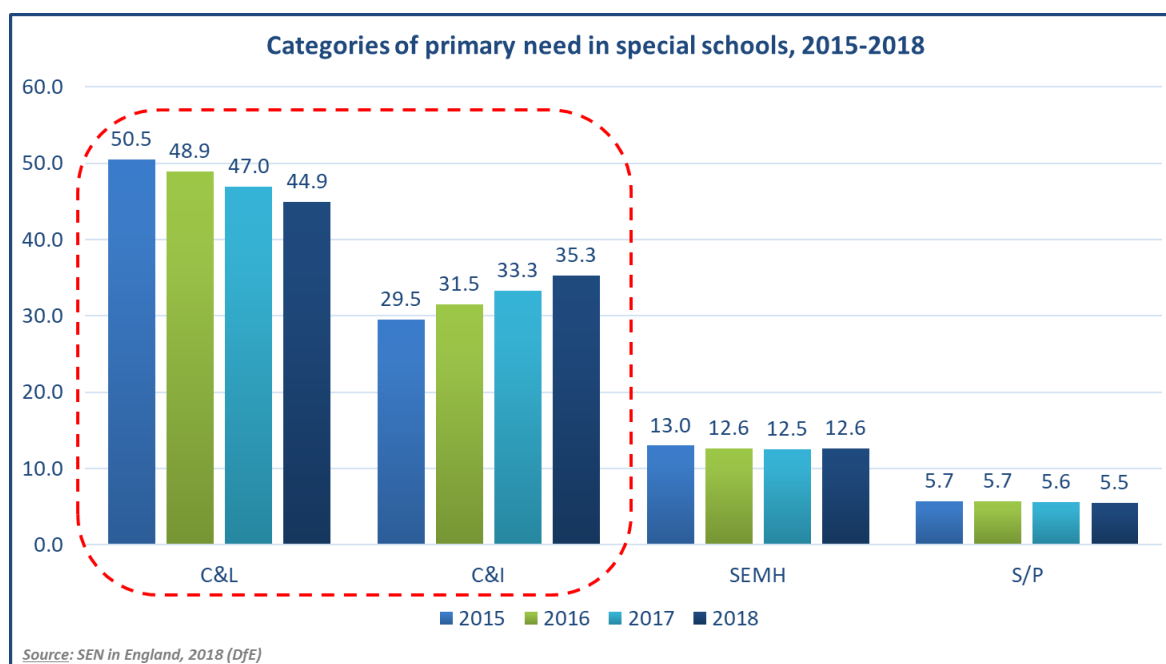
on children aged up to five years old, into family centres, with a multi-faced offer of support for young people aged from birth to 25. Family centres provide a hub for offering a range of universal and targeted support to families, as well as helping to co-ordinate early help support across Barnsley and signpost families to support.

Crucially in Barnsley, responsibility for all wraparound family support services has been brought together in a single service. As well as the family centres, this includes the education welfare service, the youth justice service, and school place-planning, admissions and fair access. This means that there can be a holistic approach to supporting the needs of children and young people at risk of becoming marginalised or excluded from school, or where they or their family require additional support at home. Combined with a new approach to collaborative working amongst schools and with the Council, which is providing a greater sense of collective ownership of inclusion across the borough, this means that there is both healthy mutual challenge but also a clear offer of early help, family support and inclusion services that can be deployed to support young people and their families.

Chapter Five: Developing responsive, flexible and effective local specialist provision

Why this matters in local SEND systems

It is vital that there is a strong, strategically-planned and coherent offer of specialist provision in a local SEND system. The challenge, for local areas, is ensuring that the pattern of provision in a local SEND system can respond swiftly and effectively to the needs of the local system, and operates as part of a wider continuum of support, services and provision to ensure that young people with SEND can access the support that they need, wherever possible within or close to their local communities. We noted at the outset of chapter three that national data showed the overall profile of primary needs of school-age children with SEN changing. This applies just as much to special schools, as the chart below shows. Again, the data here relate to four broad categories of primary need: they do not take account of more fine-grained definitions of needs, nor of the combinations of needs that young people in special schools may have. It does, however, indicate that the overall pattern of needs that special schools are seeing is changing, specifically with an increasing proportion of their pupils having communication & interaction (C&I), including autism, as their primary need.



In this chapter, we highlight the three key practical messages that council colleagues said were important in ensuring that local specialist SEND provision could play a responsive, flexible and effective role within the local SEND system.

Work with local specialist providers to develop robust routines for considering changing patterns of needs and shaping a profile of local provision that can meet those needs

Many local authorities have developed sophisticated mechanisms for planning places in mainstream primary and secondary schools. Unfortunately, planning places in special schools is not as straightforward a task. Council colleagues whom we engaged for this work described some of the

approaches they were developing to planning places in special schools. They reflected, however, that these approaches were not yet well established in local areas across the country. In part, this reflects the difficulty of predicting the demand for special school places, given that young people's needs are changing and the fact that parental choice plays a significant role in the decision whether a young person attends a special or a mainstream school. In part, this also reflects the fact that places in special schools are under increasing pressure, and thus the focus of council officers can often be more on the day-to-day task of finding places for young people, with less scope and capacity for long-term strategic planning and commissioning of provision.

Where councils had developed approaches to planning places in special schools, they had done three things.

- a. Triangulation of data and intelligence** – council colleagues argued that planning places in special schools was less of a strictly analytical activity, as compared to planning places in mainstream schools, and required a more nuanced, fine-grained and strategic approach. In practical terms, this means that planning special school places involves not only looking at local demographic trends, but also triangulating this with data and intelligence about current trends. These include trends related to the SEND system – proportions of pupils with EHCPs, proportions being placed in special schools, types of needs of the pupils placed in special schools. This also includes drawing on data and intelligence from a wider range of sources – data held by local health services on births of children with complex needs, intelligence about recent Tribunal cases, requests for exceptional funding, reasons for placements in provision outside the local area, for example. Colleagues described a process whereby they would develop an initial projections model, based purely on current trends, and then “sense-check” this against broader intelligence about what was happening within the system – testing whether the picture shown by the data matched what professionals and specialist providers were seeing in their day-to-day work, but also considering the potential impact of local strategic initiatives (for example, developing greater capacity to support pupils through preventative, targeted services). One council that participated in this project described using the concept of “confidence intervals” as a way of capturing the potential range in demand for specialist provision, and the assumptions on which this was based, to inform local commissioning decisions.
- b. Putting providers in the picture** – places in special schools are an important, sought-after, highly-specialist and expensive local resource. As such, it is vital that this expertise is used to meet the needs of the young people in a local area who would benefit most. For this reason, it is important that leaders in local areas consider not only whether they have *good* local specialist provision, but whether they have the *right* local specialist provision. If local specialist provision is not aligned to the current needs of the local SEND system, this can result in gaps in the local offer of support and a lack of choice or appropriate provision for young people with SEND. It is, however, difficult for a special school, working in isolation, to have this perspective on system-level trends (especially if places continue to be in demand) or to have the confidence or resources to reshape their offer accordingly. As such, it is vital that councils work closely with local specialist providers as a group, sharing intelligence and keeping them informed about system-level trends and emerging needs, sharing challenges with them and working collaboratively to shape an effective and strategically-planned local offer of specialist provision. This is another example of the potential benefits of applying co-productive principles to a key relationship in the local SEND system.

- c. **Pro-actively engaged colleagues from the independent and independent and non-maintained special school (INMSS) sector** – almost all councils (all except 10, according to the most recent published data) place young people with independent and/or non-maintained special schools. Relationships and levels of partnership working between councils and INMSSs vary across the country. During this work, we heard about examples of local areas that had worked closely to develop stronger strategic partnerships with INMSSs and create a more explicit role for those providers as a cost-effective way of filling gaps in local provision. For example, we heard from one council that had worked with a local INMSS to offer local provision for pupils with high-functioning autism, complementing the offer from other local special schools, and working with local mainstream schools to reintegrate pupils into mainstream education at the appropriate time for them. As we noted earlier, relationships between councils and INMSSs vary considerably, but this example suggests that there may be opportunities for councils to engage some key INMSSs on a partnership basis in discussions about what the local area needs to commission, bringing them into the local offer, and helping to shape a coherent and responsive offer of local specialist provision. Likewise, we heard from a group of councils who were working collectively to co-ordinate their commissioning conversations with local INMSSs to ensure they could plan provision strategically and get the best outcomes and value-for-money. Such approaches appeared, however, to be relatively rare.

An evidence-informed approach to planning need for specialist SEND provision in East Sussex

A key aspect of an effective local SEND system is being able to shape local provision to current and anticipated future needs. This, in turn, requires local areas to have effective means of projecting and mapping likely future needs. In recent years, East Sussex have developed and refined a model for projecting likely numbers and needs of children and young people with EHCPs. This has been a vital tool in enabling East Sussex County Council to plan the capacity needed within local services and provision, including informing the planning and successful bids for two new special free schools.

The model seeks to estimate the numbers of children aged 4-18 and young people aged 19-24 with EHCPs broken down by their primary needs. It considers and seeks to triangulate a range of sources of data and intelligence including:

- recent trend data (the numbers of young people with ECHPs and specific primary needs over the last six years);
- other intelligence about local needs – e.g. information about likely future trends from local support services, health services or family support services; and
- broader data and studies of national trends – e.g. patterns of diagnoses, prevalence rates for specific needs.

In 2016-17, the model's projections of the number of children aged 4-18 (for 2017-18) with EHCPs was within 1% of the actual figure.

Develop a range of “mainstream plus” options to broaden choice and ensure that there are a range of ways in which young people can be supported in the environment and community that is right for them

Where local areas have sought to take a strategic approach to shaping local specialist SEND provision, a key component of their approach has been to develop a broader range of “mainstream plus” models. What we mean by “mainstream plus” are models of supporting pupils in provision that sits between a traditional mainstream school model of support and that of a special school. A range of models would fall under this heading, including special units and resourced provisions, although some local areas may call these provisions additional resource bases or enhanced mainstream schools, for example. Behind these terms, there can often be differences in the way in which support is provided – the amount of time a pupil spends in mainstream classes relative to a specialist learning environment, the nature of in-class support, whether the placement in the provision is full-time or part-time, whether outreach support is offered. Likewise, the needs of pupils in which the provision specialises vary across different settings and local areas, depending on the needs that are met by other services and provisions (targeted services, special schools) in the local area.

From our discussions with council colleagues, there was no single right “mainstream plus” model. Instead, council colleagues argued that it was important that there was clarity about the role that “mainstream plus” models should play within the local continuum of inclusion support, services and other more specialist forms of provision. This included making certain that there was a shared understanding of the role, specialism, model of support and fit with other services across the continuum of provision between the council and the school hosting the provision. Furthermore, it was important that this was understood by a range of colleagues within the council and wider partnership, including commissioners, those with responsibilities for making placements, those involved in supporting school improvement, and other professionals who may give parents and young people advice about schools. To avoid “drift” and a dilution of the clarity of roles, council colleagues it was important that this understanding be set out formally, for example in a service-level agreement, and there should be clear processes for considering trends, demands and future needs and adapting provision accordingly.

The overall aim is to ensure that there are a range of choices and pathways of support for young people whose families wish for them to remain in, and who would benefit from, a local mainstream school with support. This can help to avoid creating additional pressures on mainstream schools and specialist provision.

Develop collaborative processes for considering and developing bespoke placements for young people with the most complex needs

It is likely that there will be instances where a young person’s needs cannot be supported in local specialist provision, and alternative placements need to be sought. This can be because local special school places are full, or because a young person’s needs require a highly specialist form of support that is not provided in local special schools. In some instances, for example in the case of very low incidence and complex needs, the numbers of young people requiring a certain kind of placement may be so low that it would not be sensible for councils to maintain their own local provision. In these instances, there is an important role to be played by highly specialist regional providers including those in the INMSS sector.

At the same time, however, while there may be placements made in specialist provision outside the local area for positive reasons – because that placement is best for the young person – it is important to avoid councils being in a position of having to seek placements outside the local area due to a lack of available and/or suitable provision. Given the complexity of the young people’s needs and costs of placements, the councils we engaged were keen to ensure that their use of specialist provision in general, and placements outside the local area and/or in the INMSS sector in particular, was the result of strategic planning and effective decision-making.

A key message from the councils we engaged in this project was that local areas need to have explicit, strong and collaborative processes for considering placements of young people with the most complex needs and determining the most suitable placement. This should enable strategic and planned use of INMSSs, but also local solutions to be found by utilising local provisions and services in more flexible, creative ways. Local areas described how they had sought to bring together special schools for collaborative discussions about how they might, through working together, provide or develop more bespoke placements so that young people had the choice of being supported in their local community rather than having to be educated outside the local area. Many council colleagues emphasised that, in addition to fostering collaborative working between local special schools and other local specialist providers, involvement of other agencies, including health and care services (to consider input from therapeutic services or links to wider family circumstances), was essential for this process to work well.

The special schools partnership in Manchester

Several years ago, Manchester City Council and the leaders of the fourteen Manchester special schools agreed to devolve some additional resources from the high needs block to the partnership of special schools. This was done in response to the fact that the City was seeing growing numbers and increasing complexity of need, and consequently more requests for additional support from special schools and growing numbers of children needing to be placed in specialist provision outside the city.

The aim of the special schools partnership was to enable special schools to consider collectively what they would need – and what they could offer together – to support young people with the most complex needs. The partnership meets half-termly to consider requests for additional support from individual special schools to put in place bespoke packages in order to support young people in local provision. There is an agreed criteria and process for requesting additional, time-limited funding, which school leaders use to moderate one another’s requests. The partnership has a budget of £500,000 – resources that are used to build capacity within local provision, which without the partnership may need to be spent on securing placements outside the city.

Special school and Council leaders consider that this approach has enabled a more transparent, cost-effective, swift approach for schools to access support, while it has also fostered collective problem-solving and sharing of effective practice between schools. Crucially, it has also enabled Manchester’s special schools to support children with the most complex needs more effectively within local provision.

Manchester is, however, growing rapidly, which in turn has increased the pressure on school places. For example, over four years, numbers of EHCPs have increased by 60%. Responding to these pressures has been a challenge across the whole of the local education system, including among special schools. Nevertheless, the special school partnership has been crucial in enabling special

schools and the Council to work together to agree medium- and long-term plans for shaping specialist provision to respond to the needs of Manchester's young people with SEND.

In addition to ensuring that decisions about the placements of pupils with the most complex needs are taken in a deliberate and measured way, council colleagues emphasised that it was important that their placements were commissioned with a strong focus on outcomes. Some local areas described how they ensured that, in their contracts for placements in provision outside the local area and in the INMSS sector, they specified clear outcomes and goals for where the young person would be in one year, two years and so on. In some cases, depending on the needs of the young person, there may be an explicit outcome related to the transition of the young person back into less specialist provision, or their progression onto the next stage of their development. Other local areas described how they had focused closely on key transition points for young people placed outside the local area. They described how they identified young people coming up to transition points – moving between Key Stages, or moving into post-16 education – and putting in place a range of options to ensure they had a wide range of choices to pursue their aspirations and progress in their education.

Reshaping specialist provision in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

In 2013-14, the borough was facing significant demand pressures, which, if left unchecked, were projected to result in a large overspend on the high needs block.

The Council adopted a number of long-term measures to address this challenge. First, it established some core strategic principles, agreed with mainstream and specialist leaders, about the importance of meeting needs in mainstream settings as far as possible and in local provision. Second, they developed a strong local offer of additional resourced provisions in mainstream schools. Third, they put in place a more robust panel decision-making process regarding top-up funding and placement decisions, and direct reports on high needs block expenditure to the Assistant Director and Schools Forum. A high needs block working group – a sub-group of the Schools' Forum, chaired by a headteacher – was established to ensure broad understanding and ownership of the issue, with a dedicated professional responsible for overseeing and analysing spend from the high needs block in real time.

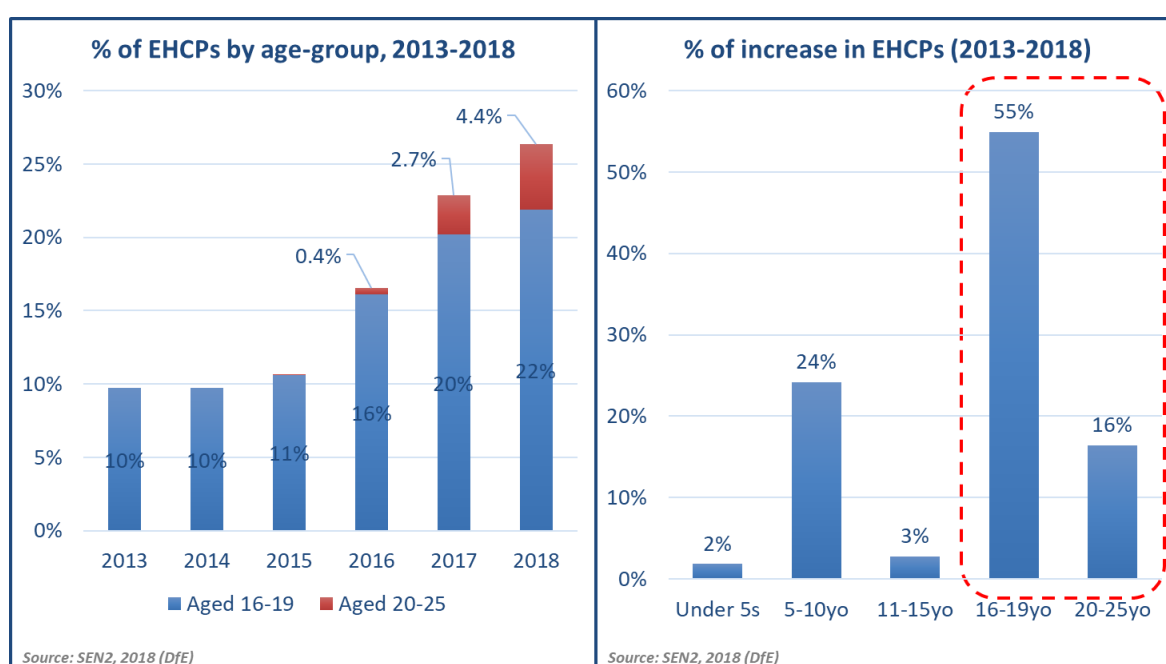
A large part of the strategy was also reducing out-of-area placements. These had peaked at 70+ in 2013-14, with the LA making 15 new placements annually. The LA did three things. First, they homed in on out-of-area placements being made straight from mainstream schools. Second, they put in place sharper, outcomes-focused contracts when making placements, with clear exit plans and transitions criteria. Third, they focused on children coming up to key transition points, and worked on developing alternative, local packages for those children. Over three years, the number of children placed outside the borough due to a lack of alternatives within Barking and Dagenham has reduced by 50%.

The high needs block is kept under regular review, with the group currently working with the Council to plan specialist places for the next five years. Leaders in Barking and Dagenham reflect that the context remains challenging – demand for support and the population growth in the borough – but that the actions taken in 2013-14 and since have ensured the borough is not facing a far greater set of challenges and pressures that it would have otherwise.

Chapter Six: Preparation for adulthood

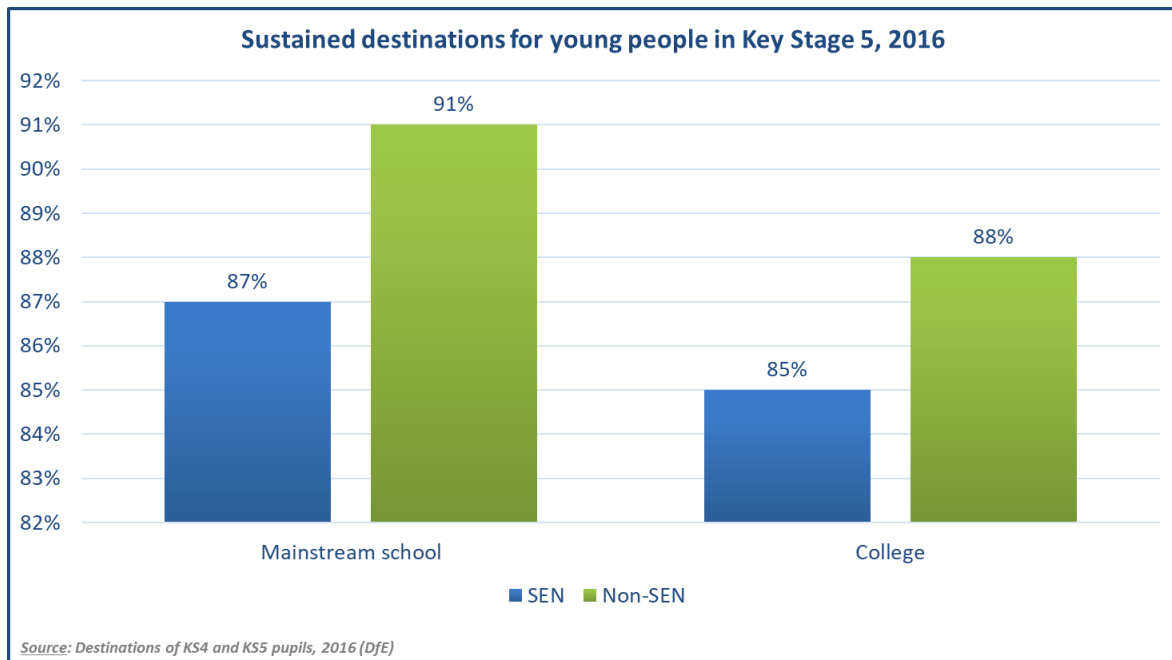
Why this matters in local SEND systems

Many of the councils that we engaged in this work reflected that preparing for adulthood was the aspect of their local SEND system where there was the greatest need for further development. We highlight this as a theme here for two reasons. First, this is a significant area of growing demand in local SEND systems. Those young people about to make the transition to adult life, namely those aged 16-25, account for the largest proportion of the growth in EHCPs over the last five years. The left-hand chart below shows the year-on-year increase in the proportion of young people aged 16-19 (which has doubled from 11% in 2015 to 22% in 2018) and 20-25 (which has increased from zero to 4.4%) among all young people with EHCPs. The right-hand chart shows that when the total increase in the number of EHCPs are considered, 71% of the growth has come amongst young people in the 16-25 age-range.¹



The second reason for focusing on preparation for adulthood is that there is a gap in outcomes for young people with SEND compared to their peers when it comes to their destinations after they leave school. The chart below shows proportion of young people at Key Stage 5 in mainstream schools and colleges in the 2014/15 academic year who sustained a destination in education or employment two terms after the end of Key Stage 5 – in other words, those who progressed onto further study or employment after Key Stage 5 and were still in that placement two terms through the next academic year. The chart shows a clear gap between the proportion of young people with SEND who sustain their destination (87% of those leaving mainstream school, 85% of those leaving mainstream college) and their peers (91% and 88% respectively).

¹ It is, however, important to note that some of these young people will previously have had Learning Difficulty Assessments that have been transferred into EHCPs. Our point here is to recognise that there has been an overall increase in the number of young people with EHCPs for which LAs are responsible for helping to plan and keep up-to-date.



We want to be careful not to conflate preparing for adulthood with post-16 and post-19 education, employment or training. A key message throughout this project has been the importance of thinking about a young person’s long-term aspirations and pathways from their earliest age. Council colleagues emphasised the importance of having a joined-up approach to thinking about long-term outcomes for young people that runs through early years settings, schools, colleges and other education providers. In particular, they highlighted the need to build such an approach into processes for drawing up plans for young people, both EHCPs and less formal plans for young people with SEN support, annual reviews and consideration of medium- and long-term outcomes. What we would also emphasise, however, is the importance of local areas having well-developed approaches to planning for and supporting young people as they approach the transition to adulthood. This chapter sets out three key ways described to us for councils to do this.

Be pro-active in gathering feedback from young people about their aspirations and use this intelligence to commission pathways that will enable young people to pursue their goals

Many young people with SEND will make the transition from school to further study, training or the world of work successfully and minimal support. Others, however, may require their transition to be planned carefully, with thought given to the support they need as they move between very different settings and the types of study programmes that will allow them to pursue their aspirations. The challenge, as described to us by council colleagues, was the potential for a mismatch between the post-school study programmes available in the local area and learning and support pathways needed by young people with SEND. Specifically, council colleagues noted that without careful and pro-active planning, colleges and other post-16 education or training providers may not be in a position to put in place the types of support and study programmes that students looking to join them may need. To address this, some local areas have taken a pro-active approach to planning and commissioning post-16 and post-19 pathways for young people. In the process, they have created “win-win” situations for young people, colleges and education providers, and councils. There are two aspects to this.

The first aspect of this approach is to engage specific cohorts of young people early – at the point when they will have a reasonably clear idea about what they want to study after they leave school, but leaving sufficient time that their feedback can be acted upon by local post-16 education providers. This requires:

- **pro-active identification of cohorts of young people who are likely to need more intensive support around transition** – for example, young people in special schools, units or resourced provisions, or those in mainstream settings likely to require support with the transition to adulthood;
- **a clear process for consulting young people about their aspirations** – this is valuable both in terms of gathering intelligence that can be used to shape the local preparing for adulthood offer and study programmes, but is also a key means through which to empower young people to exercise their agency and rights to shape their own future as young adults; and
- **being able to capture and collate young people’s feedback** – for example through pro-active engagement of young people in Years 9 and 10 and through annual reviews of EHCPs, and being able to draw out key themes and requirements for post-16 and post-19 study programmes.

A crucial point emphasised to us by council colleagues concerned the need to focus on the aspirations of the young person, and to empower the young people themselves to make decisions concerning their future. Council colleagues recognised this could often require careful handling, since the aspirations of the young people and the aspirations their parents or carers may have for their children may not always align.

Planning personalised pathways and progression for young adults with SEND in North Yorkshire

In 2011, North Yorkshire County Council conducted a mapping exercise to look at post-16 provision for young people with complex needs. They found local providers were not confident in supporting young people with complex needs, and that there was often no single co-ordinator to provide reassurance and a point-of-contact for families. As a result of a lack of local options, most young people leaving special school had to go outside the local area to continue their education.

In response, the LA worked with partners to pilot personalised learning pathways in one locality. This started with a cohort of five students in 2011. There are three pathways – personal progress, independence and employment. Pathway co-ordinators work from a “hub” to develop partnerships with local employers, colleges and community organisations to put in place tailored packages for young people to pursue their aspirations. Initially, this initiative came up against the expectation of residential college provision from parents. By the second year, having seen the success of the first cohort, there was growing confidence that the personalised pathways offered an effective, alternative local offer. In addition, all young people have a “destinations statement”, agreed by the young person, their parents and professionals so that there is clarity about expected outcomes at the outset and progress can be tracked. This project has been rolled out to all five localities. At the start of the 2018/19 academic year, there were 69 students on personalised learning pathways.

In addition, over the last two years, North Yorkshire have sought to broaden this approach and strengthen preparation for adulthood planning for a wider group of young people with SEND. The Council have put in place a new routine whereby they engage students with SEND in Year 10, to gather information about their long-term aspirations and what they would like to study in Key Stage 5, as well as the support that they will need. This process is repeated for pupils in Year 12 as they

prepare to leave sixth form at special school. The Council then collate this intelligence and share this with local colleges, working with the colleges to develop and commission study programmes that reflect young people's aspirations and needs. The Council report that this has been beneficial for young people (a wider range of options tailored to their ambitions), the Council (securing the right pathways for young people) and colleges (being able to plan their programmes and support in advance). In particular, it has been important in strengthening the transition from school to college for young people on SEN support.

Outcomes have been positive. Sustainable transition-planning is at the heart of this work, and young people have moved on into supported and full-time employment, supported internships and further education.

Using this feedback, councils described how they could then bring colleges and local post-16/-19 education providers together to agree what the offer of local study programmes should be. Councils noted that, often, there were fewer fora for colleges and post-16 education providers to come together than there were for schools, but recognised the importance of convening the former specifically to consider support for young people with SEND. This allowed for a conversation in which the council could set out the types of study programmes and forms of support that young people with SEND would need and inform a discussion about how local options could be put together to meet those needs. Crucially, council colleagues argued, these discussions should take place at least one academic year before the young people were due to start their study programmes, to allow the colleges and providers time to plan their curricula, staffing and support programmes. Put simply, the aim here is to enable a timely and strategic conversation about the likely need for study programmes and support for young people with SEND so as to create a range of options in the local area through which young people can pursue their aspirations.

Council colleagues argued that being able to go to local colleges and post-16 education providers with a clear ask of "this range of study programmes, these forms of support, for these young people who are likely to be coming to your setting" created a win-win situation for all concerned. It was beneficial for colleges, since they could have confidence when planning their programmes about likely uptake. It was also beneficial for young people, since there were more likely to be the programmes and pathways that would enable them to pursue their aspirations. Lastly, it was beneficial for councils, since it offered a better range of local provision and a wider choice for young people.

Council colleagues made one final point about the importance of having dedicated leadership and co-ordination of this agenda. They noted that these arrangements required there to be someone responsible for co-ordinating feedback from young people, driving discussions with colleges and post-16 providers, and shaping local packages of support. Without someone playing this co-ordinating function and owning this agenda, it was less likely that there would be the right range of study programmes and support pathways for young people with SEND as they continued their studies and prepared for adult life.

Developing local options and improving long-term outcomes in Wiltshire

A key focus of work in Wiltshire has been on strengthening support for young people with SEND making the transition to adulthood. There have been two ways in which Wiltshire have sought to do this. First, to foster a greater focus on long-term pathways, destinations and outcomes from an early age, Wiltshire have developed an integrated 0-25 service. This enables professionals to provide a continuity of support for young people through their childhood and into early adulthood,

without the need to navigate handovers and transitions between services. It also fosters earlier planning of long-term destinations so all support can be focused on helping young people to achieve their aspirations. As a result, since launching the 0-25 service, Wiltshire have seen a steady and significant rise in the numbers of young people with SEND moving into good quality employment of more than 16 hours per week.

Second, Wiltshire have also sought to avoid a lack of local choices meaning young people with SEND having to look outside the local area for their education and training opportunities after they leave school. They have worked closely with young people to gather intelligence about the aspirations and plans. This has then enabled them to go the local colleges with information about likely numbers, types of study programmes and forms of support that are likely to be needed for young people with SEND in the future. This pro-active approach has enabled local colleges to build their support and study offers, and enabled the Council to promote these opportunities to young people. As a result, over the past five years, the numbers of students with SEND attending local colleges has quadrupled from 67 to over 300.

In parallel, pro-actively engage local employers, and support them to develop opportunities for young people with SEND to make a successful transition to the world of work

Council colleagues argued that it was important, in parallel, to take a similarly pro-active approach to broadening the range of pathways into the world of work for young people with SEND. We know, for instance, that young people with SEND are less likely than their peers to find formal, paid employment after they move on from formal education. We also know, however, that being able to work, support themselves and live independently matter greatly to young people, including those with SEND.

Where councils had made strides in developing the pathways into the world of work for young people with SEND, they had done two things. First, they had created a preparation for adulthood co-ordinator role, or equivalent. Often, this role combined responsibilities for shaping study programmes as well as employment pathways – and, as we describe in the next section, broader packages of independence and care support. Again, the crucial point is having someone who is responsible for shaping local study programmes and employment pathways, who can put together bespoke packages of support, and who can take a creative and pro-active approach to engaging local partners.

Second, led by a preparation for adulthood co-ordinator or someone in a similar role, councils had taken a pro-active and incremental approach to engaging local employers and starting discussions about creating meaningful opportunities for young people to enter the world of work. The range of local employers will differ across local areas, depending on the make-up, geography and economy of the locality. In many local areas, major employers who could be engaged in this way included hospital trusts, universities, high-street shops, sports clubs and local offices of large private sector companies. Council colleagues reflected that it was vital to:

- identify a key contact with the prospective employer with whom one could work to shape an employment opportunity for young people with SEND;
- support the employer to design and develop a pathway, providing support and advice about how they could best support young people with SEND and any specific adjustments they may need to make;

- work with the employer to roll-out a work placement, supported internship or apprenticeship, for example, being on hand to provide support and refining how the placement and support worked based on learning and feedback from the young people themselves;
- work with the employer to test and evaluate the work placement, drawing out lessons for the future, evidence of the benefits for the young people, but also evidence of the value for the employing organisation; and
- take an incremental approach to engaging other prospective employers, drawing on the learning, evidence of impact from existing work pathways, and an understanding of what works for the young people and for employers.

In many local areas, one of the largest local employers will be the council itself. Colleagues were keen to emphasise the importance of the council playing its part in offering opportunities for young people with SEND to enter the world of work by creating pathways within the council itself. Some councils have started to offer supported internships or apprenticeships for young people with SEND. They noted that this often required a co-ordinated leadership approach across several council areas, such as education, employment, adult services and corporate functions. Corporate leaders and elected members could play a key role in facilitating this join-up.

Developing routes into the world of work for young adults with SEND in Manchester

Ensuring that young adults with SEND have a range of pathways into the world of work has been a local priority for leaders across the SEND system in Manchester. Many young people with SEND in Manchester have described how they want to be able to travel, work and live in the city independently. As a result, Manchester have been pro-active in creating supported internship opportunities for young adults with SEND. There is a strong partnership between the Council, local colleges, special schools, supported employment providers and host employers – the city currently has supported internship and employment pathways in the Council, two local hospitals, Manchester Airport, media city and a leisure centre provider, with plans in train to develop further, employer-based pathways. In 2018, over 70 young people are undertaking supported internships and there are plans to increase by at least ten every year. Of those undertaking supported internships, 80% of interns move into work. Since 2012, 91% of those young people have maintained their employment.

In addition, there is a strong emphasis on what is termed “good week planning” across the city – this means utilising the range of opportunities available in Manchester to provide young people with a full programme of meaningful activities that will help them continue their education, development, and prepare them to be as independent as possible in adult life. Staff in schools, colleges, adult education, social workers and caseworkers in the SEND team work closely with young people and their families to develop ‘good week plans’ that will help them achieve their preparing for adulthood outcomes. This might be a personalised package including college or adult education, work experience, travel training and community activities – giving the young person chance to continue to learn, maintain friendships, keep active and have fun. As one Council officer put it, ‘the preparing for adulthood agenda has absolutely been grasped by all special schools and colleges in Manchester.’

Ensure that there is a strong, *joint* local offer of education, health and care options to enable young people with the most complex needs to make a successful transition to adult life

Many of the local areas we visited described how they were focusing on strengthening the transition between children's services and adult services for young people with more complex needs who may need support from adult care services as they entered adult life. Many council colleagues described how they had sought to put in place structures to enable effective, joined-up planning – moving to integrated 0-25 services or creating dedicated transitions teams, for example. A key message from council colleagues concerned the dual importance of having an effective transition planning *process* while at the same time creating an effective joined-up *offer* of support for young adults with SEND.

In terms of the process, council colleagues highlighted the importance of being pro-active in identifying the cohorts of young people who were likely to require joined-up, multi-agency support as they made the transition from childhood to adulthood. Council colleagues noted that it was often helpful to think about three broad cohorts of young people who could require this support:

- young people who were likely to require ongoing support from adult services due to having profound care needs, often linked to physical and/or medical needs and very complex learning difficulties;
- young people about whom they may be safeguarding concerns, often combined with SEMH needs, who may be placed in care and/or in residential provision during their childhood; and
- young people, often on the autism spectrum, who have coped well in a structured school environment but who find the transition to a large college and more independent style of learning very challenging.

Councils argued that it was vital to have effective processes for identifying these cohorts (and other young people likely to require more bespoke support in the transition to adulthood). This would often involve effective joint working across education, health, and children's and adult services colleagues. It could also involve close working with schools to identify young people at risk of not making a successful transition post-school. Council colleagues also noted the importance of starting these planning discussions early, in a young person's early teenage years rather than when the young person was approaching their 18th birthday – both across services, but also through engagements with families.

As well as having an effective transition planning *process*, however, it was also vital that those involved in supporting a young person with SEND through the transition to adulthood had a clear sense of the overall *offer* of services that could be drawn into that young person's support plan. Council colleagues emphasised that it was important to avoid a situation where each service or agency knew about their own offer – e.g. SEND officers knowing about education study programmes, adult services knowing about care packages – but had little understanding of how these could be fitted together to form bespoke packages of support. Ensuring that there was a widely understood and collectively owned local offer of preparation for adulthood support – ranging across education, care, health, employment, adult education, housing, third sector partners and so on – was seen by council colleagues as a vital pre-requisite for effective transitions to adulthood for young people with SEND. This enabled local areas to develop approaches that fostered the creation bespoke packages, making use of all resources and opportunities in the local area. This could help local areas to create full-time packages of support for young people, avoiding parents feeling that they may have to sacrifice working in order to care for

their children once they left school. Overall, council colleagues argued that combining effective, early planning processes with a joined-up offer across agencies and partners gave local areas the best chance of being able to offer a wide range of opportunities and pathways for young people to pursue their aspirations, develop independence, have their support needs met, and remain connected to their local communities.

Piecing together the bespoke packages of support for young adults with SEND in Calderdale

Colleagues in Calderdale found that, year on year, they were seeing growing numbers of young adults with SEND aged 19 and older leaving school and moving into residential college placements. Colleagues were concerned that, while such placements may be the right choice for some students, other young adults were having to leave the local area and their local networks due to a lack of local options and pathways for them to pursue their aspirations. In response, local leaders in partnership with parent and carers sought to develop a range of bespoke full-time packages of support and pathways offering local alternatives. They called this approach the flexible five-day offer. This has involved piecing together inputs from a range of local services to provide an offer of full-time education and development for young adults with SEND. For instance, Council officers worked closely with:

- the local college to develop the offer of study programmes and support for students with SEND;
- courses offered by the local adult education service to complement the programmes offered through further education providers;
- independent travel training providers to develop a more comprehensive training offer;
- local businesses and voluntary sector organisations to develop a range of work experience opportunities and routes into employment.

Colleagues reflected that there was a wealth of opportunities available locally, but the issue had been that these had never been collated and pieced together. As such, a dedicated co-ordinator was appointed to draw together local opportunities and develop bespoke full-time, five-day packages for young people that included education, work experience and community activities. While previously numbers of young people going to residential post-19 provision had been growing, this year Calderdale placed only one young person into residential provision where this was a positive choice based on the young person's needs.

Conclusion

Under each of the six areas of local SEND systems that we have explored in this report, there have been some overarching themes that have been common across all aspects of the local SEND system.

- a. **Taking a pro-active, evidence-informed, strategic approach to shaping local support, services and provision** – whether this concerns the local offer, support in mainstream settings, targeted services, specialist provision, or preparation for adulthood. Colleagues have emphasised the importance of gathering and triangulating data, intelligence and feedback, and using this to inform discussions with partners and stakeholders, as well as individual young people and families, about the shape of local support and services.
- b. **Developing co-productive relationships** – local SEND systems include many different partners, organisations and sets of interests and responsibilities. Getting it right in supporting young people with SEND effectively is not something that any one organisation or agency, support group or provider can achieve on their own. Meaningful partnerships, based on a shared appreciating of the context and challenges, and with solutions developed through co-productive working are crucial to effective operation of local SEND systems.
- c. **Effective processes and routines** – given the multi-faceted nature of local SEND systems, consistent practice in identifying needs, putting in place support, reviewing support plans, planning for young people’s progression is crucial to enabling young people with SEND to make the most of their education and childhood and pursue their aspirations as they move into adulthood. This is not about having a “one-size-fits-all” approach, but rather than established mechanisms that enable professionals to be pro-active, create and person-centred when working with young people with SEND and their families.
- d. **Focusing on long-term outcomes** – a strong message that we have heard from council colleagues throughout this project has been one of the need for a joined-up, coherent approach to preparing young people for adulthood from their earliest years. Too often, council colleagues noted, what goes under the banner of “transition planning” is simply preparing the young person for their next placement, rather than something focused on the young person’s long-term goals. Within local SEND systems, a focus on specific outcomes for young people needs to be at the heart of system-level commissioning decisions as well as individual support for young people and their families.

How can councils and their partners know whether, by putting in place such practices, their local SEND system is operating effectively? This will, no doubt, vary from local area to local area, depending on their context, their strengths, and the areas that they need to strengthen. From the councils that took part in this project, we heard about:

- the importance of having a regular cycle of self-evaluation across all partners;
- having a clear understanding of the sorts of data and intelligence that will indicate whether specific strategic approaches or practices have been effective – for example, being clear if one success measure of an outreach service or a short-term provision is the proportion of young people who can remain included in a mainstream setting or reintegrated successfully;
- taking account of a broad range of data about how the system is operating, and triangulating this with intelligence from the system – for example, considering school improvement, progress and standards in the context of a holistic picture of the consistency of inclusion, support and progress for young people with SEND;

- considering systematically the qualitative feedback from young people with SEND, and their parents and carers, and being transparent in sharing strengths and areas for development with them; and
- most importantly, focusing continuously on long-term outcomes for young people with SEND.

It is, however, easier to list these points than it is to put them into practice. A key strength of many local areas has been the relationships developed between councils, health services, education providers, third sector partners, young people and families. While this is certainly a strength, it also indicates one key vulnerability of local SEND systems, which is the reliance on the goodwill and personal relationships between partners and agencies. Effective leadership, co-production and formal governance arrangements can help to mitigate this risk, but council colleagues were keen to emphasise how important it was to continue to invest time in fostering relationships and partnerships, given their importance to the local SEND system and the risk that those relationships could change very quickly.

Likewise, in some local areas, the challenges faced have led to and been reinforced by tensions in the relationships between key local partners, which can in turn prevent leaders in those local areas from putting in place some of the practices we described in this document. The council colleagues we engaged through this project recognised the nature of some of these challenges. While not offering a complete solution, they argued that one pragmatic approach in such instances was to do two things. First, council colleagues highlighted the importance of identifying some key issues on which there was agreement that things were not working as they should be and where partners had a strong interest in improving the situation. This could include using data and evidence to demonstrate objectively that young people with SEND were not being well served by the local system, or where parents considered they had to battle to receive support, or where pressure on places in specialist provision was diverting local capacity and resources from more preventative approaches. Second, council colleagues suggested it could then be beneficial to bring other partners into the discussion – for example, working with the Regional Schools Commissioner and MAT chief executives and directors where there were concerns about rising levels of exclusions in a diverse local education system to bring together all types of schools for a discussion about the implications of such a trend and what would be needed to reverse it.

A second area of pressure and vulnerability that council colleagues identified related to the pressure on local resources. As we noted at the outset of this report, this project has been focused on what councils and their partners are doing and can do at a local level, within the current context, to strengthen and embed effective practices within their local SEND systems. We are undertaking a parallel piece of work, also commissioned by the LGA, looking at the nature of financial pressures facing local areas. Nevertheless, it is important to note two things in the context of the present report. First, while we have emphasised the importance of being strategic, taking stock of local support and provision, and working creatively with young people families and partners, we note that there are local areas that are locked in a cycle of having to respond reactively to pressures and crises. For some local areas, not having the right offer of preventative support or provision locally has meant resources are having to be spent on alternative and often more expensive provision, which in turn reduces the resources available for early, targeted support and can exacerbate the problem. With pressures on the SEND system and high needs block growing, this can leave local areas with little room for manoeuvre when seeking to shift from a reactive to a more pro-active, planned and strategic approach.

As we noted at the start of this report, the council colleagues that took part in this project entered into it willing to share their experiences, ideas and learning generously. We have sought to capture and highlight what we have learned from them in this report. Council colleagues also, however, wanted to caveat this by saying that these practical examples and reflections were offered in the spirit of actions that could be taken to mitigate the effects of the challenges the SEND system is facing. They highlighted that such practices could also help to ensure that local resources were used to best effect to seek to achieve good outcomes for young people with SEND. They did not, however, consider that undertaken on their own at local level, these practices were the whole solution to some of the underlying causes of those challenges.

We hope, therefore, that the examples and practices described in this report are, in the immediate term, useful for leaders in local areas, enabling them to reflect on their practice and compare it to approaches that have been developed elsewhere. We also hope, that the overall themes described here can help to inform constructive discussions between leaders within local SEND systems, in councils and among their partners, and national decision-makers about how to support effective and sustainable practices in local SEND systems.

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