



Report to Children's and Education Select Committee

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Title:	SEND Improvement Journey
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Ward(s) affected:	none specific

1. Executive summary

1.1 This paper:

- sets the context of improvement in relation to our overarching SEND and Inclusion Strategy and the local SEND landscape
- details the improvement priorities (including preparation for adulthood) and the progress made against them, as captured in our SEND Improvement Plan
- describes the governance structure that ensures oversight, scrutiny and challenge
- references the Care Quality Commission/Ofsted SEND inspection that is expected within the next 6 months and our inspection readiness activity.

2. Content of report

Context

2.1 The Children and Families Act (2014) outlined new duties for local authorities on how services and support are delivered for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (known as the SEND reforms).

Key features of the reforms are:

- the change from Statements of Special Educational Need to more holistic Education, Health and Care Plans

- a broadening of the age range of those children and young people covered by the Act, from 2 – 19 to 0 – 25 years old
- an increased focus on a child centred approach and co-production with families and professionals
- the development of the Local Offer, a free accessible hub bringing together all the information and services that might be useful to children and young people with SEND and their families.
- the opportunity for young people to make their own decisions about their future once they turn 16 if they choose to do so, instead of the parent/carers
- an increased emphasis on helping children and young people to prepare for adulthood (from year 9 upwards) so they have high aspirations and can feel confident about their futures and the transition to adulthood and independence.

2.2 The SEND Code of Practice (2015) provides further information on the implementation of the new duties.

[SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441672/SEND-code-of-practice-0-to-25-years-2015.pdf)

2.3 In Buckinghamshire there has been significant activity to implement the reforms. SEND is a key priority across the Council; leadership is strong and is actively driving change across education, health and social care. Families and Carers Together (FACT) Bucks, the parent/carer forum play a key role in ensuring the voice of children and families is heard. They are pro-active and committed to working with teams and Services as a “critical friend” to help steer and support improvements that will make a real difference to children and young people with SEND and improve their experience in Buckinghamshire.

2.4 A new 3-year Buckinghamshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy was published in January 2020 following a period of engagement and co-production with stakeholders.

<https://schoolsweb.buckscc.gov.uk/media/56587/send-inclusion-strategy-buckinghamshire.pdf>

2.5 The strategy sets out the collective ambition for children and young people with SEND and is aligned with the 4 Preparing for Adulthood Outcomes as defined in the SEND Code of Practice (section 7.38).

“Preparing for adulthood means preparing for:

- *higher education and/or employment – this includes exploring different employment options, such as support for becoming self-employed and help from supported employment agencies*

- *independent living – this means young people having choice, control and freedom over their lives and the support they have, their accommodation and living arrangements, including supported living*
- *participating in society, including having friends and supportive relationships, and participating in, and contributing to, the local community*
- *being as healthy as possible in adult life.”*

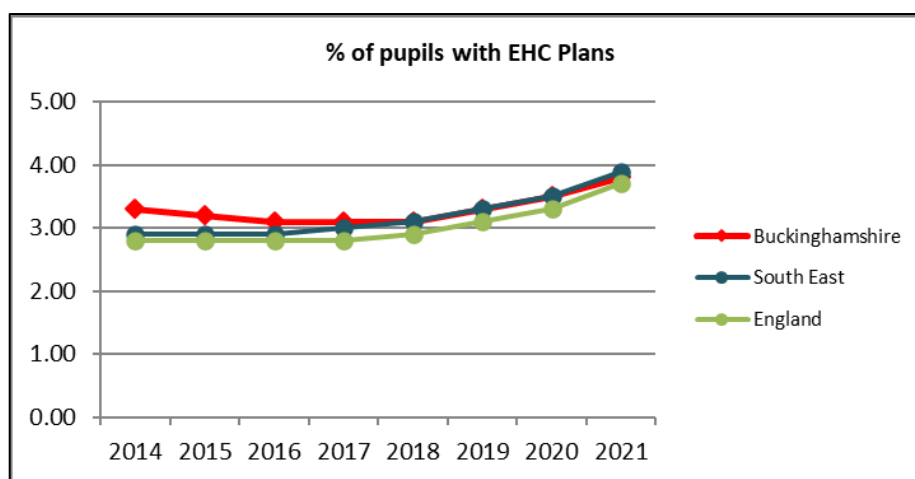
The Buckinghamshire SEND landscape

2.6 The Children and Families Act (2014) identifies two distinct categories for children with SEND, following a ‘graduated response’ to identification of needs and provision:

- 1) Children and young people in receipt of SEN Support; these children make up the majority of the SEND cohort and are mainly provided for within the SEND element of schools’ delegated budgets.
- 2) Children and young people with a higher level of need who require a statutory Education, Health and Care Plan, maintained by the Local Authority, usually with additional funding provided to the school to meet provision requirements.

2.7 In Buckinghamshire:

- Fewer pupils in Buckinghamshire schools (10.1% or 8559 children) are registered to receive SEN Support than the national average (12.2%) (Jan 2021 school census).
- More pupils in Buckinghamshire schools have an EHCP (3.8%) compared to the national average (3.7%) (Jan 2021 school census).
- There were 4910 EHCPs maintained by Buckinghamshire in January 2021, an increase of 315 (6.9%) from the previous year (SEN2 Return Jan 2021). The rate of increase is slowing in comparison to other local authority areas; since 2014 the number of statements/EHCPs in Buckinghamshire has increased by 55.4% compared to 81.6% across England and 92.2% within our statistical neighbour group. Currently, there are 5265 children with EHCPs maintained by Buckinghamshire (11 October 2021).



- The number of pupils with EHCPs with a primary need of Autism has increased significantly (+115%) in Buckinghamshire since 2015. Those with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs have also increased considerably (+58%). There is also significant growth in areas of complex need (profound and multiple learning disabilities 105% and multi-sensory impairment 180%). Although these latter groups make up a smaller population overall, they are a cohort that require a high level of specialist provision.

Number of children and young people by primary need

Primary need	Mar 201	Mar 2017	Mar 2018	Mar 201	Mar 2020	Mar 2021	% change from 2015
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	715	868	1008	116	1339	1539	↑ 115%
Hearing Impairment	84	85	89	92	96	98	↑ 17%
Moderate Learning Difficulties	646	648	643	731	787	731	↑ 13%
Multi-Sensory Impairment	10	12	16	21	22	28	↑ 180%
Physical Difficulties	269	276	265	280	304	289	↑ 7%
Profound and Multiple	39	43	48	52	61	80	↑ 105%
Social, Emotional & Mental Health	463	492	483	588	692	730	↑ 58%
Severe Learning Difficulties	124	128	153	154	169	157	↑ 27%
Specific Learning Difficulties	146	127	113	139	180	190	↑ 30%
Speech, Language and Communication Needs	822	836	781	871	970	1053	↑ 28%
Visual Impairment	55	58	62	66	73	84	↑ 53%
Not Recorded / Other	63	35	78	18	32	52	↓ 17%
Total	343	3608	3739	417	4725	5031	↑ 46%

- 35.1% of the children and young people with an EHCP issued by Buckinghamshire attend maintained or academy special schools, which is broadly in line with the national average of 35.8% (Jan 2021).
- 42.0% of children in Buckinghamshire with EHCPs are supported in a mainstream school compared with 39.9% nationally, which is above the national average. However, Buckinghamshire (14.3%) is below the national average (16.7%) for those attending mainstream Further Education settings. (Jan 2021).
- 4.6% of children in Buckinghamshire with EHCPs are supported in a mainstream school with an Additionally Resourced Provision (where they spend part of their day) compared with 4.8% nationally (Jan 2021).
- 69% of children attending independent or non-maintained special schools have Autism (40%), SEMH (18%) or SLCN (11%) recorded as their primary areas of need (Jan 2021).
- Buckinghamshire's recorded combined Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) and Unknown data for 2020/21 was 7%, which has reduced by 3.2% since 2019/20. Buckinghamshire NEET with SEND in year 12 and 13 is 11.3%, increasing from 10.3% in 2019/20.
- Buckinghamshire has 6.2% of adults with a learning disability in paid employment, as reported by NHS digital for the latest statutory return for 2019/20. This is slightly below the average of 6.9% for the South East.
- A number of children with SEND are also receiving support from Early Help services or are open to Social Care.

Number of Children & Young People with a Maintained EHC Plan at 14th January 2021, by Social Care Involvement

Children and Young People with a maintained Statement/ EHC Plan who were:											
Receiving an Early Help		Receiving services as a Child in Need		Subject to a Child Protection Plan		Looked After (LAC)				Care Leavers	
						All		S20			
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
87	1.8%	370	7.5%	45	0.9%	104	2.1%	27	0.5%	30	0.6%

Proportion of Children & Young People with a Statement/ EHC Plan with each Social Care Involvement- Trend


Receiving an Early Help Intervention						Receiving services as a Child in Need (CIN)						Subject to a Child Protection Plan (CP)					
2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Trend	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Trend	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Trend
1.1%	#N/A	1.6%	2.6%	1.8%		12.9%	14.4%	13.4%	12.5%	7.5%		1.5%	1.6%	0.9%	1.3%	0.9%	

Looked After (LAC) - All						Looked After (LAC) - S20						Care Leavers					
2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Trend	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Trend	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Trend
1.8%	1.7%	2.0%	2.2%	2.1%		0.6%	0.7%	0.8%	0.7%	0.5%		0.4%	#N/A	0.4%	0.5%	0.6%	

SEND improvement

- 2.8 Across Education, Health and Social Care there is a shared commitment to ensuring the best possible outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- 2.9 A comprehensive self-evaluation informed the development of our overarching SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2021-23 and this has enabled us to clearly identify where our strengths lie, and the areas we need to develop. A multi-agency Local Area SEND Improvement Plan details specific actions that are being taken against 8 priorities. <https://schoolsweb.buckscc.gov.uk/media/56586/send-improvement-plan-buckinghamshire.pdf>

Priority 1: SEND Support

- 2.10 The number of pupils identified to receive SEN Support is currently below that of our statistical neighbours and national comparators (10.1% in Buckinghamshire, compared to 12.2 nationally [SEN 2 Jan 21]). This suggests we may not be identifying all pupils who have additional needs in a timely enough way.
- 2.11 A range of actions have already been completed. We have:
- co-produced an Ordinarily Available Provision document that provides guidance to settings, families and professionals about the type and level of support that is available to children and young people as part of the graduated approach to meeting needs. This comprehensive document was well received by schools and other settings but is yet to be fully embedded.
 - co-produced a SEN Support Toolkit which provides schools and settings with practical information on how they can support children proactively at the earliest stage, while also working alongside their families.
 - launched a new Educational Psychology SEN Support offer which aims to support schools in identifying needs and addressing them sooner as part of an early intervention approach.
- 2.12 Further work is required in this area including:
- working to increase the number of Level 3 qualified SEN Coordinators (SENCOs) in early years settings to ensure needs can be identified at the earliest stage, and to raise awareness across all schools and settings of the importance of early identification and the graduated approach.
 - reviewing the way specialist teaching services are delivered. A public consultation launched on 8 November to seek views of families and other stakeholders. The proposed new approach would help to ensure schools and other settings can be supported to identify needs at the earliest stage.
 - further embedding Ordinarily Available Provision and the SEN Support Toolkit.
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Priority 2: Sufficiency; Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

2.13 The number of children and young people with Autism or Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs has increased significantly in Buckinghamshire, reflecting a national trend. It is challenging currently to ensure these children have the most appropriate educational placement to support their learning. A range of actions have already been completed. We have:

- publicly consulted on a new 5-year SEND Education Sufficiency Strategy. This aims to ensure there are enough suitable placements in Buckinghamshire to meet forecasted demand.
- developed autism friendly standards for mainstream primary schools to work towards. Special School head teachers will be auditing a sample of mainstream primary schools during this academic year to identify achievements and offer support.
- strengthened the monitoring of children and young people who do not have an educational placement, including those known to Social Care. Plans for this particularly vulnerable cohort are now only ceased following discussion and agreement with the virtual school.

2.14 Further work is required in this area including:

- developing a Buckinghamshire 'All Age Autism' strategy (aiming for summer 22 for publication) with alignment to national strategy.
- finalising the SEND Education Sufficiency Strategy so it can be published in January 2022.

Priority 3: Preparation for Adulthood (PfA)

2.15 It is important that all young people with SEND are prepared for adulthood from year 9 onwards, in line with the SEND Code of Practice, 2015. This means supporting them to develop their skills, knowledge and abilities to enable them to make a smooth transition into adult life, whatever that may look like for them. A range of actions have already been completed. We have:

- developed links within Buckinghamshire's PHSE network to ensure that life skills and preparation for adulthood is included within these sessions in the Spring term 2022.
- delivered our second Shout Out for SEND Conference (13 October 2021) which was attended by 51 young people from 18 Buckinghamshire schools. The conference was planned with young people from our SEND youth forum

and was co-hosted with them. Interactive workshops were delivered by a range of organisations on subjects including apprenticeships, volunteering, work experience and supported internships. Young people shared their lived experience of their own transitions aimed to inspire their younger peers:

“A few years ago, perhaps like some of you, I was ashamed of the labels I was given. Perhaps like some of you too, I hated school. I remember getting up each morning going into an environment that was a sensory nightmare After college, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do so I decided to take a gap year. During this time, I eventually realised that there was a need for disabled children and young people to feel less alone, so I decided to set up an Instagram account where I documented my experiences as an autistic adult existing in a world that wasn’t built for people like me. It is powerful that people are willing to listen to my voice and shows how much of a need there is for disabled voices to be heard. More recently, I have just started university, studying education studies, and am hoping that I can use my experiences to help others. I want to leave you with one message and that is, you are capable of building the life that you imagine for yourselves, whatever that looks like and that things always get better no matter how hard they initially seem.” (Louise, aged 19)

Following the conference, animated clips of the post 16 pathways will be created and published on Buckinghamshire’s Local Offer. These are intended to explain the range of options open to young people with SEND and encourage them to take the next step. A road show is now being planned to further disseminate the learning to a wider audience.

- offered supported internships linking with 9 employers. This provides opportunities for young people with SEND to have real employment experience especially in the fields of hospitality and healthcare, housekeeping and cleaning. 70% of internships from this programme led to meaningful employment in 2020. Stony Dean Special School also provide supported internships and independent travel training to their pupils, leading to meaningful employment for their students.
- secured additional mental health funding for 2 transition posts to work with young people to facilitate and support them to access adult mental health services and support embedding the transition process. Through 2021/22 the focus will be young people known to social care and those with SEND.

2.16 Further work is required in this area including:

- continuing to work with Bucks Skills Hub to align young people’s career guidance at year 9 with the Annual Review of their Education, Health and Care

Plan. This will ensure young people's aspirations are feeding into their Plans and steps can be taken to achieve them.

- completing mapping of current housing options suitable for young people with SEND with a view to identifying areas to develop and include in future housing strategies based on forecast needs.
- reviewing transitions between Children's and Adult Social Care Services to identify improved ways of working and achieve better cohesion between teams, to ensure a better transition and experience. Similarly, Buckinghamshire Health Care Trust are reviewing their transition processes, using the Ready Steady Go questionnaires where appropriate and holding teenage clinics on specific themes i.e. diabetes.

Priority 4: Joint Commissioning

2.17 Joint commissioning as an approach is well embedded in Buckinghamshire and there is a strong history of working in partnership with providers to deliver services. There are however pressures within the system. A range of actions have already been completed. We have:

- invested £750,000 within neurodevelopment services to reduce waiting lists for those children waiting for an autism assessment.
- held a collaborative workshop scoping pre-diagnostic support for those children waiting for a neuro developmental assessment; initial service offer due to be in place by January 2022.
- focused on the uptake of health checks for young people with learning disabilities aged over 14 years which has improved performance in this area by over 25%.
- agreed additional investment within children's integrated therapies services for this financial year.
- continued investment into Speech Link for schools to facilitate early identification of children with communication difficulties.
- achieved very short waiting times for those with intellectual disabilities within CAMHS (11 days). CAMHS have also surpassed their access target in achieving 42% against a 35% target.

2.18 Further work is required in this area including:

- improving waiting times for diagnostic assessment. Currently, the Neurodevelopmental Diagnostic Collaborative (run by Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust and Oxford Health Foundation Trust is at clinical capacity. Leading to a significant waiting list. Initial findings from a substantial review

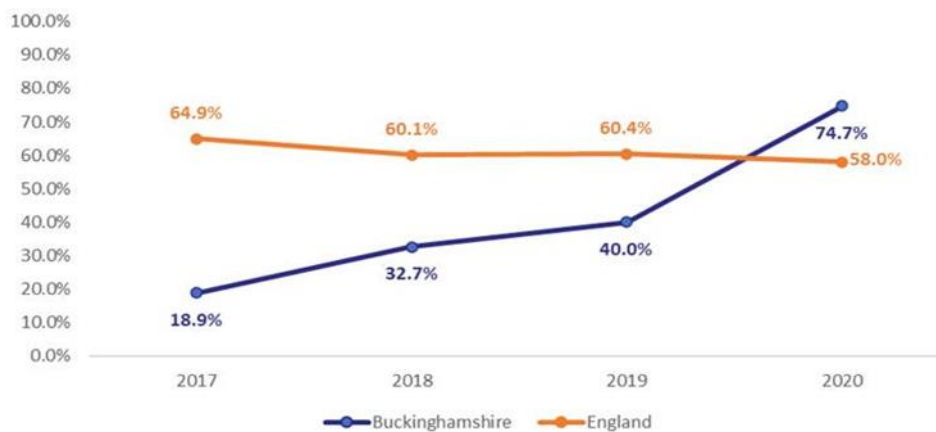
into the pathway (and surrounding system) made a number of recommendations and an action plan has been drawn up by the Neurodevelopment Collaborative.

Priority 5: Statutory Performance (SEND Operations)

2.19 This priority covers the range of statutory functions that underpin the support for children and young people with SEND. Increased oversight and performance monitoring have been integral to the improvements achieved. A range of actions have already been completed. We have:

- increased management oversight of the EHCP process which means that significantly more Plans are now issued within the 20-week statutory timescales. In Buckinghamshire, 74.7% of new EHCPs (excluding exceptions) were issued within 20 weeks during 2020. This has increased from 18.9% in 2017. Nationally 58% of EHCPs were issued within 20 weeks during 2020. Currently, for 2021 (Jan – Sept) performance is above 80%.

Percentage of EHCPs issued within 20 weeks (excluding exceptions)



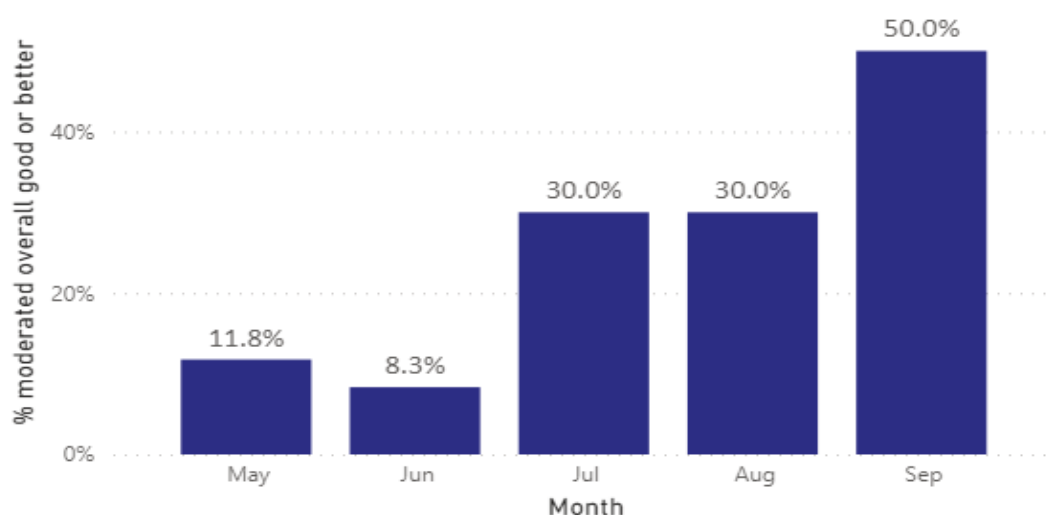
2.20 Further work is required in this area including:

- increasing the focus on improving Annual Reviews of EHCPs. This includes making better use of our internal ONE system to enable us to monitor children's progress toward achieving the outcomes specified in their Plans.
- developing our points of communication with families through the new ONE portal. This portal has been live since 4 October 2021 and is the new way of collecting the professional advice required to create an EHCP. Enabling families to provide information about their child through this portal and view the advice provided by others is the next step.

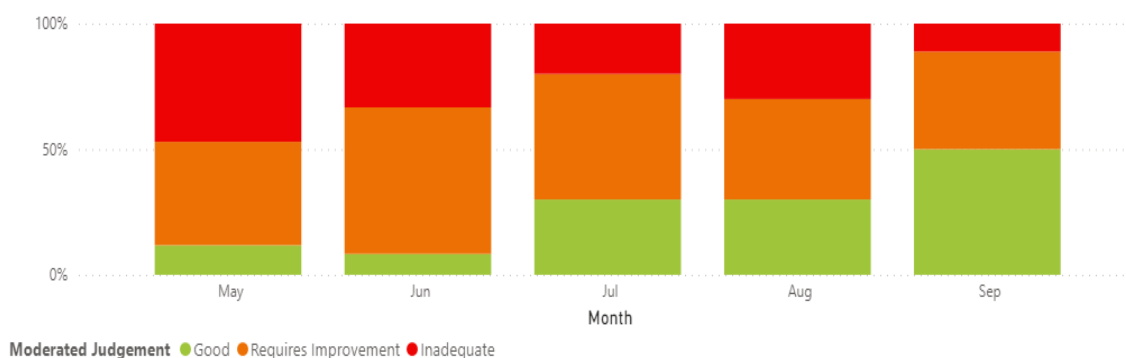
Priority 6: Quality Assurance

- 2.21 Quality assuring EHCPs is a key part of the improvement work and takes a multi-agency approach given the numerous contributors to a Plan. Audits completed over the last quarter are beginning to evidence higher quality plans being issued. The number of EHCPs judged to be good is increasing (Sept: 50%) and the number judged to be Inadequate is reducing (August 30%, Sept 11%).

% of moderated audit judgements that are good or outstanding



Overall moderated audit judgements - new plans



- 2.22 A range of actions have already been completed that have led to these improvements. These include:

- managers reviewing an increased number of Plans prior to them being issued to families.
- managers and Education, Health and Care Coordinators receiving more detailed feedback on the outcome of audits in their area to support the conversations happening in supervisions.

- successfully implementing a process to rectify Plans judged as Inadequate. All re-writes are now presented by the relevant officer to a moderation panel within 2 months. Dates are also now scheduled to cover all Plans judged as Inadequate since January 2020. This process is being carefully tracked and monitored.

2.23 Further work is required in this area including:

- resuming the quality assurance of existing EHCPs that have been amended following Annual Review. This project is currently being scoped as part of a larger piece of work on Annual Reviews.
- ensuring a common understanding across teams and services about what a good EHCP looks like to ensure consistency and high quality EHCPs.

Priority 7: Local Offer Advisory

2.24 The Buckinghamshire Local Offer has been developed with parents, carers, young people and professionals and is continually being reviewed and improved. The multi-agency Local Offer Advisory Group, including a representative from FACT Bucks, directs and oversees the ongoing improvement and development of the published Local Offer and ensures feedback is acted upon.

2.25 A range of actions have already been completed. We have:

- completed in-depth user research and user testing to help develop the website.
- conducted a review of the content by subject-matter and content-writing experts to ensure it meets best practice and accessibility regulations.

2.26 Further work is required in this area including:

- ongoing promotion of the local offer to all families of children with SEND. A recent FACT Bucks parent/carer survey with 530 responses identified that 77% of respondents had never used the Local Offer, though 56% had heard of it. Those who had used the Local Offer at least once gave mixed responses about the helpfulness of the information in it. Updating the Local Offer content and making sure it is helpful to families continues to be a priority of the Group.

Priority 8: Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

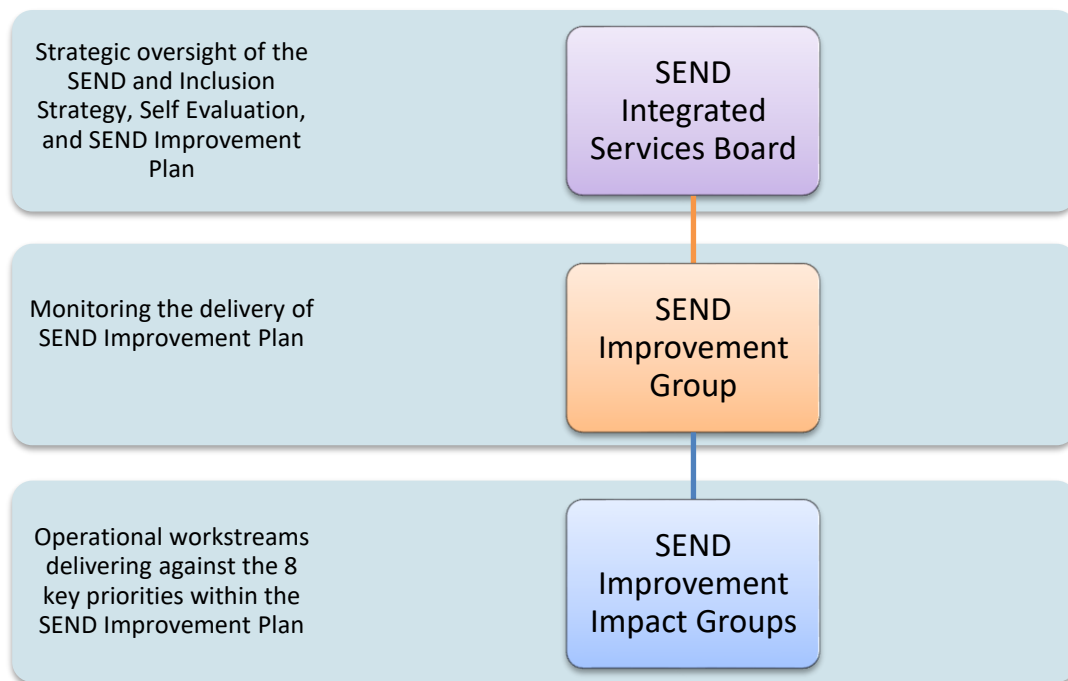
2.27 Buckinghamshire has a vibrant voluntary and community sector and this priority has enabled key representatives from the sector to come together to coordinate and share how they contribute to the offer for children and young people with SEND. This includes activity sessions, training days, employability programmes as well as more formal provision that may be part of an Education Health and Care Plan.

- 2.28 A range of actions have already been completed. We have:
- promoted the Local Offer to VCS providers to encourage them to register their provision.
 - conducted a survey among families to understand how much they know about local activities delivered by the VCS.
 - identified an opportunity to strengthen the collaboration between statutory services and the VCS, focusing on the Neurodevelopmental Pathway in the first instance. This has included the discussions previously referenced around commissioning a pre-diagnostic support service for children and young people with autism/ADHD.

- 2.29 Further work is required in this area including:
- improving how the post 16 offer delivered by VCS providers is promoted
 - exploring how the transition into new education and training placements within the VCS can be improved to ensure the provider is better able to support the young person's interests and aspirations.
 - developing a training package to encourage inclusive practice within community settings so that more children and young people can access activities within their locality.

Governance

- 2.30 The SEND improvement activity is governed through the SEND Integrated Services Board. The Board provide scrutiny and challenge, ensuring accountability of all agencies and partners in achieving the aspirations of the Strategy and associated Improvement Plan. The Board is co-chaired with FACT Bucks, and includes colleagues at senior level from across Education, Health and Social Care, as well as parent/carer and voluntary and community sector representatives.
- 2.31 Understanding, learning from, and acting upon the views and experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families is also a critical element of the Board's role, co-producing solutions with family representatives wherever possible. A "You said, we did" approach to children and young people's feedback is embedded.
- 2.32 The table below outlines the governance and delivery structure.



SEND inspection

- 2.33 In May 2016 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission began a 5-year cycle of Local Area SEND inspections. [Local area SEND inspection handbook \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](http://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- 2.34 In March 2020 these inspections were interrupted by the pandemic, however inspections have now resumed. As one of the few remaining areas yet to be inspected it is anticipated that inspectors will visit Buckinghamshire within the next 6 months. The inspection focuses on 3 key areas:
1. How effectively the local area identifies children and young people with SEND?
 2. How effectively the local area assesses and meets the needs of children and young people with SEND?
 3. How effectively the local area improves outcomes for children and young people with SEND?
- 2.35 Inspectors will consider:
- the leadership of provision for SEND across the local area
 - the impact of joint commissioning
 - the local arrangements, including the local offer and how well leaders understand the local area

- how well leaders have understood the impact of COVID-19 on the local SEND system and how they have adapted their plans to deal with the challenges caused by the pandemic
- whether any identified problems are long-standing and systemic or whether they have been caused or exacerbated by the pandemic.
- how the local area uses the intelligence gathered from evaluation of its effectiveness to plan for and lead future improvement.

2.36 The remit of the inspection is not limited to the local authority but covers all agencies and partners who support children and young people with SEND in the county. During the 5 days that inspectors are on site, they will talk to a range of people and organisations, visit schools and other settings, and meet with parent/carers and children and young people. An online survey will also be accessible for families to feed in their views and experiences. At the end of the inspection, a letter will be published outlining the inspectors' findings. A specific judgement is not given; however, the area may be required to submit a Written Statement of Action detailing how they will rectify any areas where significant improvement is necessary.

2.37 Buckinghamshire has been preparing for the inspection for some time and the improvement activity described above is enabling critical issues to be fully understood and addressed. Specific inspection readiness activity is helping to prepare colleagues across agencies to showcase Buckinghamshire's strengths, and be able to articulate where we still have more work to do, and how work is progressing in these areas. Buckinghamshire's strengths and areas for development are summarised below.

3. Financial implications

- 3.1 The costs of the statutory activities in relation to SEND including assessment of pupils for EHC Plans and the Education Psychology Service are met from the Education Service budget. The total cost of the service is £5.7 million in the current financial year. The MTFP for 2020-23 included investment of £0.5m for additional capacity to manage the demand for EHC Plans and to ensure assessments can be completed within timescales.
- 3.2 The revenue costs of specialist provision and additional support for children and young people with SEND in schools and colleges is met from the high needs block within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The high needs allocation for 2021-22 is £99.1 million. This allocation is expected to increase by 8% in 2022-23. The council currently has a deficit against its DSG of £1.795m and, in line with Department for

Education requirements, is developing a DSG management plan to ensure expenditure can be managed whilst continuing to meet demand.

4. Background papers

4.1 Buckinghamshire's SEND and Inclusion Strategy:

<https://schoolsweb.buckscc.gov.uk/media/56587/send-inclusion-strategy-buckinghamshire.pdf>

Buckinghamshire's SEND Improvement Plan

<https://schoolsweb.buckscc.gov.uk/media/56586/send-improvement-plan-buckinghamshire.pdf>

