

Report title: Essex SEND Strategy 2021 Update	
Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 3 February 2022	For: Consideration and identifying any follow-up scrutiny actions
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County Divisions affected: Not applicable	

1. Introduction

The Committee has previously been consulted on the development of a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy. This is the requested follow up and update.

2. Action required

The Committee is asked to consider:

- (i) **The attached update; and**
- (ii) **Identify any follow-up scrutiny actions**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Committee last discussed SEND services in November 2021.
- 3.2 A link to the meeting papers for the meeting held on 10 November 2021 is here – [PAF 10 November 2021 meeting papers](#) . It was agreed at the meeting that there would be a further update to the Committee prior to the SEND Strategy being finalised which should include a workplan. Members also made other suggestions around content. The minutes of that discussion have been reproduced in Appendix A to this report.

4. Update and Next Steps

- 4.1 The update is attached in the Appendix. Next steps are as proposed under Action Required.

Expected attendees to support the discussion:

County Councillor Tony Ball, Cabinet Member – Education Excellence, Life-Long Learning and Employability.

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Alex Abercrombi - Education Delivery Manager
Helen Wall - SEND Strategy Lead: Participation and Inclusion

5. List of Appendices

- A Extract of the minutes of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 November 2021;
- B PowerPoint Briefing Paper: Essex SEND Strategy – Update Jan 22: My Life, My Rights – Essex Local Area SEND Strategy 2021;
- C SEND Strategy Working Document January 2022 – First page titled Rationale for New SEND Strategy.

Extract of the Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.30am on Wednesday, 10 November 2021 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford

3. Questions from the public

There were two questions from the public relating to agenda item 4 (the questions are reproduced in the Appendix to these minutes).

Ralph Holloway, Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation answered both of the questions raised, key points were as follows:

- (i) There was no specific SEND provision located in Maldon. A service sufficiency review, which would complement the main SEND strategy, would look at capacity across local areas. There was a headteachers roundtable forum to encourage and support local mainstream schools to be more inclusive and enhance provision in mainstream schools including looking at the expertise and resource within the school workforce.
- (ii) ECC wanted to extend how it worked with local communities, parents and young people so that families also had options other than just mainstream and statutory services. Mr Holloway confirmed he would reach out to the questioners to see how ECC could further help them and link them with the Family Forum.
- (iii) An ECC aim was to ensure journey times were kept to a bare minimum.
- (iv) A key point within the SEND strategy was preparation for adulthood and provision beyond school.
- (v) Work was being undertaken with the Targeted Employment team and employers to widen opportunities for young people with SEN and to think about possible routes into employment.

4. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2021 Update

The Committee considered report PAF/15/2021 comprising a further update on the development of a draft Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy. The following people from Essex County Council attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

Councillor Tony Ball – Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Life-Long Learning and Employability,
Ralph Holloway – Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation.

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Ralph Holloway introduced the content of the draft strategy which included aspirations for improving equity, inclusion and equal access to opportunities and outcomes for young people with SEND. He also highlighted ECC's vision for every child and young person, and the ECC pledge to act in their best interests.

During subsequent discussion, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- (i) Some of the content in the strategy was about addressing the serious weaknesses that were identified by the CQC/Ofsted inspection report. During Covid further discovery work had taken place of what worked and did not work in the local system and had included conversations with the Essex Family Forum and the Multi Schools Council.
- (ii) There would be a SEND sufficiency strategy which would look at where provision was based including where the population was likely to develop in the future to determine where there could be gaps in provision. Members emphasised the importance of working closely with local communities and district councils on local planning and housing issues.
- (iii) Essex compared relatively well compared to other counties in respect of the proportion of young people aged 16-17 with SEND who were not in employment, education or training. Opportunities to fund and support new businesses that would employ young people with SEND was being looked into.
- (iv) The Department for Education would be completing a SEND review which could impact what went into the strategy, it was important to ensure the strategy was a live document that responded to changes and circumstances and there was continued engagement with families.
- (v) Outdoor learning such as Forest Schools was being explored.
- (vi) Some Members raised concerns on long journey times and the sustainability of driving young people back and forth to specialist education centres. ECC was further encouraging how specialist provision could be included within mainstream schools to meet the needs of young people which could help reduce the need to travel long distances. ECC would continue to encourage all schools to sign up to the Inclusion Policy and emphasise the benefit to the whole community in promoting a culture of inclusion. Essex Passenger Transport could help with community transport options.
- (vii) An Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) might name a local school to attend but sometimes that school could not accommodate. This could then lead to a tribunal and the child missing out on formal education during the course of the appeal process. One of ECC's aspirations was to reduce the number of tribunals being requested. A piece of work was being undertaken that looked at where a young person with an EHCP lives and where they attended school, this helped to understand why parents made a decision to go to a school that's further away than other schools.

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- (viii) The main way a child was referred into the system was by a request from the parent or school for a statutory assessment, Essex County Council had a duty to consider requests and decide whether an assessment would be completed of that young person and decide within 20 weeks whether an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) would be issued.
- (ix) It was rare that a EHCP was ceased until the young person had left education. There was a need to consider whether there could be plans that were ceased earlier if that young person's outcomes had been reached and seen as a success.
- (x) Some parents felt they had no choice but to elect to home educate their child and this would be responded to in the strategy to try and reduce the conflict that sometimes caused that decision to be made.
- (xi) There was a need to prepare young people to be independent and parents to be more resilient and to support that independence. Opportunities were being looked into to use other sites to help prepare a young person. Also, ECC had invested in residential provision in two of their special schools to support independence and preparation for adulthood.
- (xii) Members highlighted that some young people may be 'falling through the net', especially during the pandemic and the challenge of reaching out to families not engaged with schools.

Conclusion:

It was **agreed** that there would be a further update to the Committee prior to the SEND Strategy being published which should include a workplan.

Members suggested the strategy needed:

- more detail on the rationale for a new strategy, and acknowledge the current failings in the system;
- that the narrative should link with the outcomes of the CQC/OFSTED inspection and subsequent actions;
- to include metrics as part of the section on Ambitions, and look for outcomes beyond just formal qualifications and link with individual Education Health Care Plans. Members challenged the outcomes being sought and there was the suggestion that some objectives could include reducing the number of tribunals, making it easier for parents to navigate the local system, clearer information and communications on alternatives to an EHCP and more early intervention.
- to actively promote further partnership working particularly in the community and with districts,