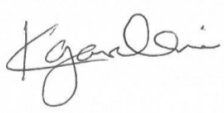


London Borough of Waltham Forest

Report Title	Waltham Forest Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2025 - 2028
Meeting / Date	Cabinet, 2 December 2025
Cabinet portfolio	Councillor Kizzy Gardiner, Portfolio Lead Member for Children and Young People 
Report author/ Contact details	Mary Jarrett, Corporate Director for Education Children's Services Mary.jarrett@walthamforest.gov.uk
Wards affected	None Specifically
Public access	Open
Appendices	Appendix 1 - Draft Waltham Forest Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2025-2028 Appendix 2 - EQIA Screening tool.

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the final version of the SEND Strategy for Cabinet approval following the period of public consultation in June and July 2025. The consultation, which ran from June 2025 to July 2025, gathered feedback from a wide range of stakeholders including parents/carers, education professionals, SEND service providers, and residents. The responses have informed the final version of the SEND Strategy, which is now presented to Cabinet for approval.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is recommended to note and approve the final version of the Waltham Forest SEND Strategy 2025–2028.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 The Waltham Forest Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2025–2028 sets out the borough's vision and priorities for improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Developed collaboratively with families, education settings, health partners, and the voluntary sector, the strategy was co-produced prior to the 2025 Ofsted/CQC Local Area SEND Inspection. This early and inclusive approach reflects the local area partnership's strong self-awareness and commitment to addressing known challenges in the system.

- 3.2 The strategy was informed by extensive engagement, including multiple contributions from parents, carers, professionals, and young people. It identifies five key priorities: early identification and intervention, strong communication and co-production, improving the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), strengthening educational settings, and ensuring smooth transitions into adulthood. These priorities were shaped by feedback from the community and align closely with the areas for development later highlighted in the Ofsted/CQC inspection report.
- 3.3 The 2025 inspection found that while there had been recent improvements in leadership and workforce stability, children and young people with SEND in Waltham Forest continued to experience inconsistent outcomes. Key concerns included variable quality in EHCPs, communication challenges, and a lack of confidence among some families in the governance of SEND services. The report also noted that workforce instability had previously hindered progress, particularly in relation to navigating the Local Offer and accessing timely support.
- 3.3 Importantly, the inspection acknowledged the value of the Parent Carer Forum and the local area's recognition of the need for change. The SEND Strategy, having been co-produced before the inspection, already addressed many of the issues raised—demonstrating that the local area partnership had a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. The strategy now provides a strong foundation for delivering the improvements required and restoring trust and confidence among families.
- 4. Options & Alternatives Considered
 - 4.1 No alternative options were considered. The Council is committed to delivering the SEND Strategy in partnership with education, health, and social care services. The strategy is essential for setting out a clear vision for SEND provision locally and for fulfilling statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014.
- 5. Council Strategic Priorities (and other National or Local Policies or Strategies)
 - 5.1 The SEND Strategy contributes to Mission Waltham Forest by promoting inclusive education, improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND, and strengthening local provision to reduce reliance on out-of-area placements. It also aligns with national statutory frameworks including the Children and Families Act 2014, the Care Act 2014, and the SEND Code of Practice (2015).

- 5.2 Locally, the strategy is a key component of the ASCEND improvement programme and is overseen by the SEND Improvement Board, which ensures a positively impactful programme of delivery. It complements the Council's commitment to early intervention, co-production, and community wellbeing, and supports the delivery of the borough's Education and Skills strategy and Local Offer commitments

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The consultation on the Waltham Forest SEND Strategy 2025–2028 was conducted over an extended period from June 2025 to July 2025, engaging a wide cross-section of the local community. A total of 95 responses were received from 301 visitors, with 93 contributors providing detailed feedback. Respondents included parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, representatives from schools and nurseries, SEND service providers, voluntary and charitable organisations, and residents without direct SEND involvement.
- 6.2 The consultation was designed to be inclusive and accessible, offering multiple formats for engagement including online surveys, targeted workshops, and discussions with the Waltham Forest Parent Carer Forum. This multi-channel approach ensured that voices from across the borough were heard, including those from underrepresented communities and families with lived experience of navigating the SEND system.
- 6.3 Key themes emerging from the consultation included:
- **Strong support for local provision:** Many respondents endorsed the principle of “local places for local children,” but emphasised that this must not compromise quality or suitability of provision.
 - **Concerns about cost-driven decision-making:** Several contributors expressed unease that efficiency and budgetary pressures appeared to be prioritised over children's individual needs.
 - **Calls for improved EHCP quality and delivery:** Respondents highlighted inconsistencies in EHCPs and the need for more transparent, timely, and collaborative review processes.
 - **Workforce capacity and training:** A recurring theme was the need for better staff retention, training, and support across education, health, and social care settings.
 - **Early intervention and transitions:** Many families stressed the importance of identifying needs earlier and ensuring smoother transitions between education stages and into adulthood.
 - **Trust and accountability:** Some parents reported a lack of confidence in the system, citing poor communication, delays, and limited access to therapies and support services.
- 6.4 The consultation also revealed a strong appetite for co-production, with many respondents welcoming the opportunity to shape the strategy and expressing a desire for ongoing involvement in service design and delivery. The feedback has been instrumental in refining the final

version of the SEND Strategy, ensuring it reflects the lived experiences, aspirations, and concerns of the community.

- 6.4 This level of engagement demonstrates the strength of the local area SEND partnership and its commitment to listening, learning, and acting on feedback. The consultation outcomes have provided a clear mandate for change and a shared vision for improving SEND provision in Waltham Forest.

7. Implications

Finance, Value for Money and Risk

- 7.1.1 There is no direct financial implication to the Council for adopting the SEND strategy. The service anticipates that the cost of implementing the SEND strategy will be met from existing resources across the General Fund and High Needs Block of the DSG, although this is hard to validate without a detailed action plan and comparison of BAU resource vs implementation. The service is already under significant pressure, with additional one-off funding agreed to fund backlog case workers, client relationships officers and commissioning resource. Despite this, the service is still overspending as several agency staff are covering permanent roles. It is anticipated that successful implementation of the SEND Strategy will manage demand more effectively.
- 7.1.2 The financial position in SEND is challenging, with increasing overspends in both the General Fund and the High Needs Block within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). At month six reporting, SEND is overspent by £4.042M in 2025/26 (£3.246M 2024/25) and the High Needs Block within the DSG is forecasting an in-year deficit of £9.512M, taking the total forecast deficit to £18.384M by the end of the financial year. Without intervention, the deficit at March 2028 (the current end date for the statutory override) is forecast to be £38.3M.
- 7.1.3 The Strategy is underpinned by a SEND Improvement plan, approved by the Department for Education which details the key milestones and saving created by service improvements. This will also be reported to the EFSA annually.
- ## 7.2 Legal
- 7.2.1 The law related to special educational needs (SEN) is within Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 (CFA 2014).
- 7.2.2 When carrying out their statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014, local authorities must do so with a view to making sure that services work together where this promotes children and young people's wellbeing or improves the quality of special educational provision (Section 25 of the Children and Families Act 2014). Local

authorities and health bodies must have arrangements in place to plan and commission education, health and social care services jointly for children and young people with SEN or disabilities (Section 26).

7.2.3 The SEND code of practice: 0–25 years (2015) sets out statutory guidelines for organisations which work with, and support, children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities.

7.2.4 The adoption of a Waltham Forest SEND Strategy is part of a range of ways in which the Council may demonstrate compliance with the statutory framework.

7.3 Equalities and Diversity

7.3.1 The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

7.3.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required in relation to this report, an Equalities screener has been completed and to affirm that the assessment found no adverse impacts arising from the proposal and identified some positive impacts for children and care leavers with SEND.

7.4 Sustainability

7.4.1 The Council, in collaboration with its partners, is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people with SEND. The implementation of the SEND Strategy is expected to have a transformational impact on local sustainability by promoting inclusive education, reducing reliance on out-of-area placements, and enhancing community-based support. These improvements will contribute to better health outcomes, increased social cohesion, and reduced demand on crisis services.

7.4.2 Children and young people with SEND are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, often due to delays in diagnosis, unmet needs and vulnerability to exploitation. The strategy's focus on early intervention and inclusive practice is critical to promoting fairness and improving outcomes. While the strategy does not directly impact climate considerations, it supports wider social sustainability objectives across the borough.

7.5 Council Infrastructure

- 7.5.1 The proposals outlined in this report are designed to be delivered within the Council's existing infrastructure and available resources. The strategy leverages current systems and staffing structures, with a focus on improving efficiency and effectiveness through better coordination and use of digital tools. In addition to the comments set out in the finance section, no additional infrastructure requirements are anticipated at this stage, although ongoing monitoring will ensure that any emerging needs are identified and addressed in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Background Information (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

None