



Waltham Forest Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2025-2028

Fulfilling potential: working together to deliver meaningful change for children and young people

Contents

Foreword: Our Pledge	2
Introduction	3
The Local Context	4
Progress in Waltham Forest	6
Principles and Priorities	7
Priority One	8
Priority Two	10
Priority Three	12
Priority Four	14
Priority Five	16
Governance	18



Foreword: Our Pledge

I am delighted to introduce our local partnership SEND strategy for children and young people in Waltham Forest. It has been produced with our local partnership to ensure it's what we need to make a positive difference to our young people and their families.

Since the development of our last SEND strategy, the local and national landscape for children with SEND has significantly changed. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact, both on child development and the planned implementation of improvements to local services.

Our young people with SEND are some of the most vulnerable in our community, and we know that families with additional needs will often face a national system with a myriad of professional interventions and countless appointments, within an overstretched system. I am committed that we do everything we can to ensure we work together with our young people, and their families, so that their voices are heard, and their priorities are recognised.

This strategy sets out how we, as a partnership of local authority, public health, NEL ICB commissioning, children and adult social care, NELFT, education settings and the parent carer forum, will work together to improve outcomes for our young people. This is a joint endeavour, and we will work across the partnership, in collaboration with parents and families, to focus on the areas identified which will make the greatest change.

I hope you find this strategy informative and aspirational for our young people.



Cllr Kizzy Gardiner

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People



Introduction

Our Waltham Forest SEND Strategy 2025-2028 sets out our vision and priorities for supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the borough. It defines our ambition to support them in fulfilling their potential and realising their full educational and life prospects.

Our vision covers the 'local area' which includes the local authority, our integrated health and care partnership, public health bodies, early years settings, schools, and further education providers in Waltham Forest. It outlines how we will work together as a SEND Partnership to deliver our local area vision over the next three years.

We share the ambition articulated in the [Department of Education's SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan](#): children and young people in Waltham Forest with SEND, and their families, need to get the right support, in the right place, and at the right time ensuring that all children and young people with SEND feel valued, are visible and included in their local communities and have the opportunity to achieve their aspirations and outcomes. The report identifies a 'vicious cycle of late intervention, low confidence and inefficient resource allocation' across SEND services nationally. This means young people with SEND do not always receive the high standard of service they deserve.

This strategy sets out the policies that will improve the experiences and outcomes of affected young people and their families. It sits alongside the council's People at the Heart of Our Place Strategy; the SEND Preparing for Adulthood Strategy; the Babies, Children and Young People Strategy; and the All-Age Autism Strategy. These plans collectively ensure residents with unique needs are supported.

Working across our partnership, we will use this document to develop a local area plan with clear targets that measure if we are realising our vision. Our children and families, along with the SEND Partnership, will hold us accountable to our goal.



Linzi Roberts-Egan,
Chief Executive of
Waltham Forest



Nicky Crouch, Strategic
Director of Children at
Waltham Forest



Lynn McBride, Assistant
Director Children's Services
at NEFLT

Our Vision

All children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities will have what they need to achieve their full potential in their early years, at school, and in college, so they may lead happy, healthy, and fulfilled lives into adulthood.

What is the purpose of this strategy?

This strategy sets out our vision, principles, and priorities for supporting children and young people with SEND, and their families. It describes what these residents, relevant professionals, and our partners consider to be most important to realising the potential of youth with SEND. The strategy is intended to rally the 'local area' around a shared vision, enabling a Local Area Plan to hold the SEND partnership to account regarding this goal.

Who is the strategy for?

- Children and young people (0-25) with SEND
- Parents, carers, and families
- Professionals working in education, health, and social care
- Local partners, such as third sector organisations (charities and voluntary organisations)

How was the strategy developed?

To develop a robust strategy that targets the key issues faced by children, young people, and their parents and carers, we undertook a detailed review of the existing local offer and the current local context to determine what changes are needed. This strategy has been co-produced in partnership with children and their families, as well as all local partner agencies who commission and provide SEND services. Partner agencies include local authority services, education settings, and health providers.

Working together, the local area facilitated:

- face-to-face workshops for professionals, parents, carers, and children and young people with SEND.
- online discussions with partners across education, health, and social care.
- online discussions with the [Waltham Forest Parent Forum](#).
- 140 contributions from across the SEND partnership including parents and carers

The Local Context

Since our last strategy in 2020, we have made considerable progress in achieving our priorities:

- Our Local Offer has been strengthened by collaborating with SEND partners and parents through forums and consultations, leading to improvements in some areas. There is still more to be done in ensuring the consistency and quality of updates to the [Local Offer](#), as well as making it more dynamic and inclusive.
- Rates of completion of our annual EHCP reviews are higher than the 2023 national average, standing at 74.1%. To fully realise our aspirations, we still need to improve the review process to satisfy statutory timelines.
- Integrated health pathways for young people with SEND have been improved through earlier interventions and assessments. This includes Occupational Therapy and Specialist Speech and Language Therapy support. This is in part due to our work to build a more informative Local Offer, better connecting residents to services available.
- New bespoke strategies for young people with specific needs include the Preparing for Adulthood Strategy; [the All-Age Autism Strategy](#); and [the All-Age Carers Strategy](#). These have led to improvements in resident outcomes, although there is still much to do to realise the values behind these changes so these plans are not just partially fulfilled.
- Finally, the development of the MOSAIC recording system acted as a pragmatic stopgap to improve our EHCP review processes, and we have now begun implementing the Capita One IT system after a thorough tender process. We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of this new system.
- 75 out of 78 of our education settings are graded “good” or “outstanding”. Three outliers are working on improvements, including to their SEND provision.
- This SEND Strategy is being drafted to inform these improvements which sets out the framework for developing a continuum of high quality local provision to better meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.

Our future success depends on building upon this progress. Whether that is by refining existing systems or by ensuring resources are efficiently allocated to realise these strategies and plans, Waltham Forest has charted the path forward.

Progress in Waltham Forest

To develop future services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Waltham Forest, a SEND Commissioning plan has been drafted to ensure there is sufficient provision to meet the increasing demand. This plan aims to enhance local specialist services, reduce reliance on out-of-area placements, and support inclusive education within the community. Under Section 27 of the Children and Families Act 2014, we conducted a consultation to gather feedback on the SEND Commissioning Plan. The Council will address priorities by increasing SEND places, equipping facilities with resources, training staff, and fostering partnerships to ensure comprehensive support for children and young people with SEND



3,468 CYP have an EHCP (April 2024)

Approx. 4% of all residents under 25yrs



Two out of three CYP with an EHCP are from a minority ethnic group (April 2024)

47% of residents are from a minority ethnic group (2021)

Three top primary needs of school age children (2023)

31% ASD* **24% SLCN^** **23% SEMH~**

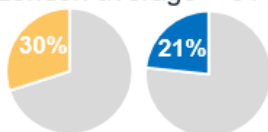
* Autistic Spectrum Condition

^ Speech, Language & Communication Needs

~ Social, Emotional and Mental Health

30% of CYP with SEN are persistently absent**

(London average = 31%)

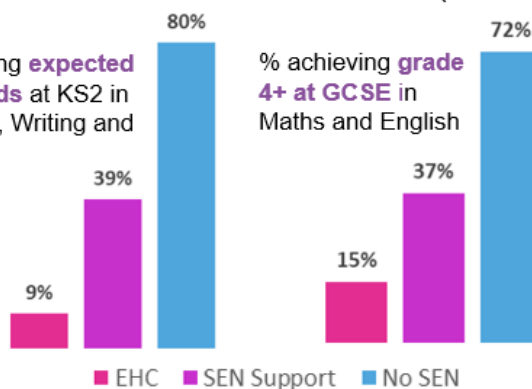


Compared to **21%** of all CYP (2022/23)

**Absent for at least 10% of time

Attainment at KS2 and KS4 (2022/23)

% meeting **expected standards** at KS2 in Reading, Writing and Maths



■ EHC ■ SEN Support ■ No SEN



Over half (52%) of CYP with an EHCP are in mainstream provision (2023)

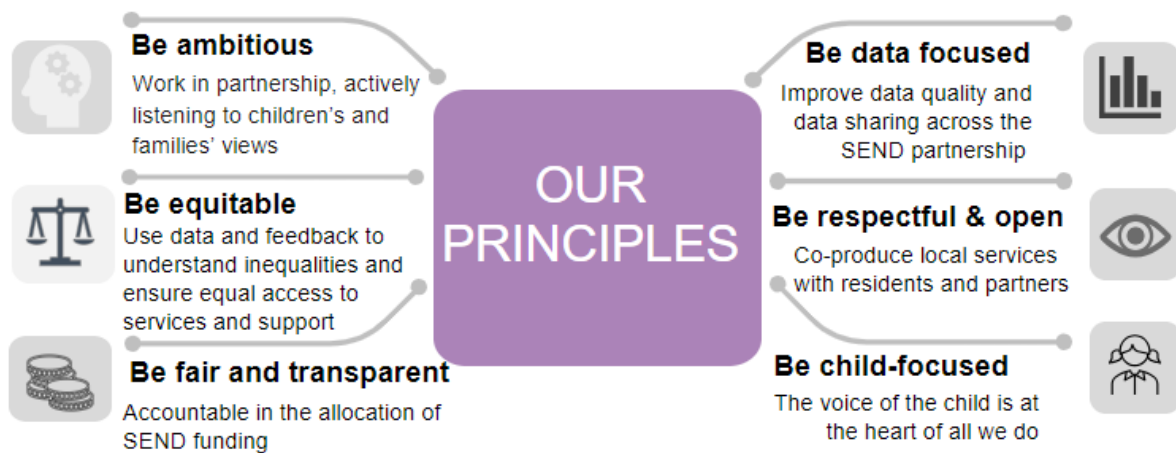
Compared to **41%** of CYP across **London**

Source: DfE SEND2 2023

Principles and Priorities

Our principles guide how we work together to achieve our vision. Co-produced and developed by families, support services, and educational partners, our principles set out what we expect of each other when working with or caring for children and young people with SEND.

Our priorities respond directly to the challenges identified by families and professionals. They will focus on five areas that have the greatest positive impact on local children and young people with SEND and link with the council's Mission Waltham Forest aim of reducing inequality in the borough by 2030 and ensuring every family and every child are given every opportunity.



Our Priorities



Priority One: Early identification and timely intervention, at the right time and in a child-focused way

Children, young people, families, carers, and partner agencies have told us that:

Children are waiting too long to access the right support, in the right way, when and where they need it.



“We need to close the gap between special school and mainstream. The current system isn’t working.”

Workshop Participant

Our ambition

Every child and young person with learning difficulty or disability has their individual needs clearly identified and understood as early as possible. Settings actively monitor and adapt to their changing requirements.

We provide the right support and advice at the right time, with a focus on timely interventions.

There is greater consistency and equity of access across the borough, strengthening the quality of services children and young people experience, regardless of where they live or where they go to school.

To achieve this we will:

- Provide a more efficient and targeted service, increasing uptake of health and development reviews within agreed timescales.
- Implement a proactive screening process to identify learning difficulty or disability at primary ages as early as possible in addition to providing timely support.
- Work together with residents and partners to ensure that access to interventions is inclusive, providing equitable access to health services, including mental health support and advice to children on diagnostic pathways, as early as is reasonable.
- Review and update our data collection systems, making information from different services and professionals more timely, accessible, and reflective of service requirements.

- Continue to invest in training and professional development for staff across all settings so they have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to provide the best outcomes for our children and their families.
- Review our short breaks offer, developing a new framework to provide higher quality breaks and respite services that better meet the needs of our SEND families.

Success will be:

- Improved feedback from children, young people, and their families and carers about the support the SEND partnership provides.
- A higher proportion of children and young people accessing trained staff while waiting for interventions at the point of need.
- A higher proportion of children and young people receiving support from staff trained to meet their needs through our interventions.
- Increased uptake of health and developmental reviews by children aged up to 5 years.
- All partners can access up-to-date, system-wide SEND data that allows them to identify who needs support, what support they need and how best it can be delivered, exposing inequalities, and enabling them to track and report progress against our five priorities.
- Staff across all educational settings trained to identify, understand, and respond to children and young people with SEND, particularly those with ADHD/ASD, resulting in measurable improvements to staff confidence and competency.
- Increased number of Ofsted registered settings and schools participating in the free SEND training offer provided by our Early Years service and Flourish Learning Trust.

People will feel:

- Valued: our children, young people, and their families and carers will receive the tailored support they need, at the right time, without lengthy delays, and their voices will be at the heart of decision-making.
- Empowered: our staff will feel more confident in applying their knowledge, skills, data, and tools to deliver effective services to improve resident-outcomes.
- Collaborative: our partners will work more closely together to build on the strengths of existing services, addressing gaps in provision, and delivering a more consistent, joined-up service.

Priority Two: Strong communication and co-production with children, young people, and their families

Children, young people, families, carers, and partner agencies have told us that:

The voices of children, young people, their families, and carers are not consistently heard in the development of our services. It often feels that services are being designed for them, not with them, and they lack knowledge and information on what support is available.

“The voice of the child needs to be consistent in the work we do”.

Workshop participant



Collaboration should be default, not an extra thing to do”

Workshop participant

Our ambition

Co-production is not just a concept, it is a shared commitment understood by all stakeholders related to SEND. Children, young people, and their families should be equal partners in shaping the SEND services that we deliver and guide the development and improvement of these services.

As a partnership, we actively seek feedback on our methods of working and our communication, using this to strengthen what works well and collaboratively address any challenges.

We want our processes and systems to be clear, well communicated, and understood by professionals, parents, and young people. Our Local Offer must be well-used, accessible, and up to date.

To achieve this we will:

- Ensure all local SEND partners, including teachers, healthcare workers, families, and young people, understand and use co-production by fostering a shared commitment to collaborative decision-making in the local area.
- Create and strengthen opportunities to ensure inclusion is at the heart of what we do so that the voices of children, young people, their families, and carers are incorporated into decision-making.
- Continuously update the Local Offer with the latest information, services, and opportunities, ensuring content is relevant and accessible.
- Communicate all SEND processes and systems in a clear and accessible manner.

- Co-produce needs assessments and EHCP reviews with youth, their parents and carers, and wider professionals without them having to repeat their stories again and again.

Success will be:

- Children, young people, families, carers and other key stakeholders report higher levels of confidence and satisfaction in our SEND services.
- A new 'Co-production Charter' is developed and agreed, leading to increased clarity among partners of their role in developing services to meet children's needs.
- Children, young people, their families, and carers will know where and how to access relevant information, resulting in an increased understanding of the support available to them.
- As co-production and communication increases, there is a reduction in disagreements, disputes, and tribunal activity with families, fostering greater trust, mutual understanding, and the proactive resolution of potential issues.
- There is a strong learning culture across the SEND partnership, with increased engagement, monitoring, and knowledge sharing championed by services including SENDIASS.

People will feel:

- Heard: the voices of children, young people, their families, and carers will be at the heart of our services. There will also be a culture of continuous dialogue where their feedback is systematically used to strengthen existing practices and address any emerging issues.
- Empowered and supported: partners will proactively share information and resources with children, young people, their families, and carers, so they can easily and confidently access support.



Priority Three: Improving the quality of our outcome-focused education, health and care plans

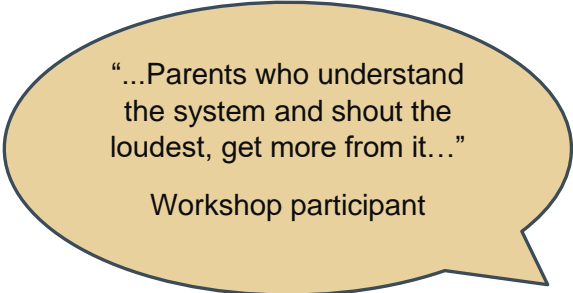
Children, young people, families, carers, and partner agencies have told us that:

There are inconsistencies across the borough in the quality of education, health, and care plans, which do not always reflect the changing needs and experiences of the child.

Our ambition

Children's needs and their outcomes are clearly articulated and understood by all local stakeholders. Their lived experience, wishes, and desires will be evident in their plans, which are written in a child-focused way.

All changes of needs are captured through regular reviews, and plans are frequently audited by all local area partners, including parents and carers.



“...Parents who understand the system and shout the loudest, get more from it...”

Workshop participant

To achieve this we will:

- Develop high quality and child focused EHC and support plans by listening to families as well as actioning the innovations below.
- Make sure all partners have an opportunity to participate in reviews having a clear understanding of expectations and timelines.
- Establish a dynamic and responsive review process to identify and document any changes in a child's needs, outcomes, and provisions over time.
- By focusing on regular audits, outcome-based metrics, real-time monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive management, Local Authority and Health Commissioning will develop a clearer oversight of resources committed into plans and routinely monitor whether they are achieving their intended outcomes.

Success will be:

- Improvements in the quality of EHCPs, with children, young people, and those that support them feeling satisfied that plans account for their views and experiences.
- A multi-agency audit schedule is in place for all local area partners, and audits are completed more quickly and collaboratively.

Annual EHCP reviews are routinely monitored for quality and compliance with statutory requirements, and to ensure they are completed within stated timescales.

People will feel:

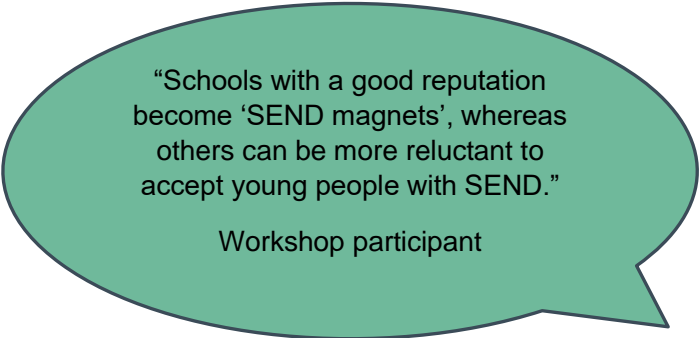
- Heard: as much as possible, the child's voice will be at the heart of the planning process and will actively shape the plans that affect them.
- Supported: our interventions will be appropriate and effective through regular reviews to determine if the child's needs are being met. Interventions will adapt to the child's changing needs.
- Informed: all partners including those in health, education, and social care, along with the families of the children, will have a clear understanding of commissioned services. They will be confident in the value of these services and be able to feedback when they feel otherwise. The transparent monitoring of the impacts and outcomes of these services will inform their views.



Priority Four: Robust educational settings with improved educational and life outcomes

Children, young people, families, carers, and partner agencies have told us that:

Support for young people with SEND in Waltham Forest can be piecemeal, reflecting a lack of borough-wide oversight and an inconsistency in staff training.



“Schools with a good reputation become ‘SEND magnets’, whereas others can be more reluctant to accept young people with SEND.”

Workshop participant

Our ambition

Local settings provide high quality, tailored, and inclusive support which effectively respond to the differing needs of children and young people. Students with SEND are supported by Ordinarily Available Provision, giving them the choice of attending a mainstream school.

Specialist provision is regularly reviewed and strengthened, supporting the attendance and achievements of children with SEND in line with our local school places and Sufficiency plan.

To achieve this we will:

- Foster a culture that not only acknowledges but celebrates diversity to ensure that all children feel valued and supported in inclusive provision.
- Continue to improve the sufficiency of our educational settings to provide local, high-quality education to children and young people with SEND.
- Continue to improve how we place the needs of children at the heart of commissioning, developing an inclusive culture across local provision.
- Thoroughly review existing Specialist Resource Provisions (SRPs) at both primary and secondary levels, enhancing their quality to support improved academic achievement.
- Improve attendance monitoring and our responses to attendance challenges, such as emotional-based school avoidance, among students with SEND.

Success will be:

- Children, young people, and families from all backgrounds are involved in varied initiatives that promote and celebrate diversity.
- School attendance for children with SEND is closer to the national average while still accounting for their health and welfare needs affecting attendance.

- Children feel more confident in attending school and any anxiety is addressed at an early stage in a way that builds confidence.
- More inclusive educational settings in Waltham Forest which receive positive feedback from children, families, and carers.
- All settings and schools embed the Ordinarily Available Provision framework and implement the recommendations from the Autism Deep Dive review. Stronger, more consistent provision should follow.
- Improved data collection and data sharing, leading to more joined-up, timely and targeted support for children and young people.
- An upskilled and stable workforce that responds effectively to current and future SEND demands.
- Continuing to enhance our local SRP provision following our comprehensive review of existing SRPs.
- The SEND provision of all our local schools is rated as “Good” or higher by Ofsted.

People will feel:

- Aspiring: youth with SEND will participate in a robust local SEND system with a well-informed workforce and a culture that appreciates diversity.
- Accommodated: more children and young people with SEND will attend a state funded school closer to where they live and feel confident, they can access the appropriate support. There will also be improved attendance, with fewer suspensions, permanent exclusions, and children studying part-time.
- Valued: there will be a reduced attainment gap between students with SEND and students without SEND, and improved school readiness for Early Years and those transitioning to secondary school.



Priority Five: All transitions prepare children and young people with SEND for their next life stages, including adulthood

Children, young people, families, carers, and partner agencies have told us that:

Transition through the various stages of education and into adulthood can be difficult – more information and guidance is needed to support children, young people, and their families move smoothly through the process

“Key Stage 2 seems to be a point at which things deteriorate. Services become more fragmented as children enter and progress through education.”

Workshop participant

“Transition to adult support is very difficult, it can be a fight to keep EHCP... adult social care offer does not always seem like the right option.”

Workshop participant

Our ambition:

Children and young people can access the information, guidance, and support they need to make an informed choice about their next life stage, particularly adulthood.

Young people with SEND are supported to be independent in their communities and have access to a wide range of supported living options, further education pathways, and local internship programmes.

To achieve this we will:

- Collaborate with partners to expand on existing transition pathways that guide young people with SEND through their educational and personal development. These pathways will be inclusive, providing comprehensive support, and well-defined.
- Provide relevant information and support to empower every young person with SEND to make informed choices about their future. At every age milestone, they should be able to consider all available options.
- Increase access to a variety of supported living arrangements, further education pathways, and local internship programmes that cater to the diverse needs and aspirations of residents with SEND. This will strengthen their employment and life opportunities.

Success will be:

- Children, young people, and their families have a good understanding of their health needs through access to the health passport and transitions tool in the Local Offer.
- Young people transitioning from children's to adult health services are able to access clear guidance and support in a timely way without experiencing significant gaps in service support.
- All transitioning children and young people have a placement by March every year.
- All SEND youth will receive appropriate careers advice, with increased numbers involved in further education, internship programmes, apprenticeships, and paid employment.

People will feel:

- Informed: children, young people, their parents, and carers feel informed about their options and well-supported when transitioning between health and social care services, and between different education stages.
- Prepared: SEND young people feel prepared for adulthood and independent living, making choices about their future with confidence.
- Empowered: SEND young people will have more opportunities to access good work and employment-based training, while workplaces will receive guidance on accommodating SEND employees.



Governance

To deliver this strategy, we developed an action plan ([read the Local Area SEND Plan, published on our Local Offer page here](#)) which details how we will drive and monitor our progress. The realisation of this strategy and the actions in our plan will be implemented by the local SEND partnership, consisting of Waltham Forest Council, public health teams, North East London ICB commissioning, children and adult social care, NELFT, education settings, and our parent carer forum. The partnership will co-produce a Local Area Plan and will be overseen by the SEND Strategic Board.

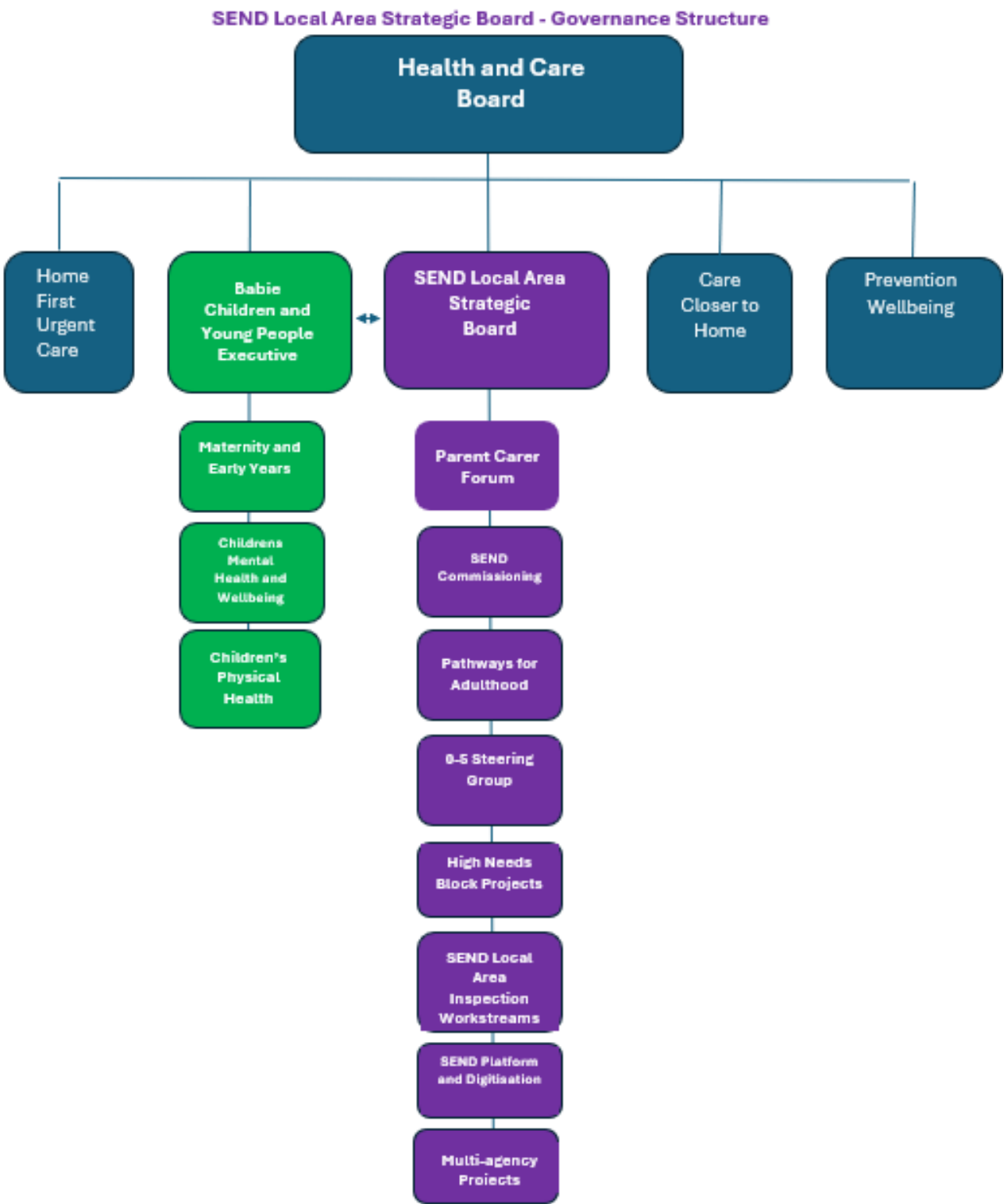
Progress will be monitored, reported, and reviewed through a robust framework established by the SEND Strategic Board in Waltham Forest. The Board convenes bi-monthly to oversee the implementation of the SEND Strategy, ensuring accountability and transparency. Regular reviews will be conducted to assess progress against clear targets and measures outlined in the Local Area Plan. The Board will analyse data, gather feedback from stakeholders, and make informed decisions to address any emerging issues.

The Local Area Plan will hold the partnership to account for delivering our five priorities. To ensure the successful implementation of our SEND Strategy, a robust framework for tracking will be established using the measures described earlier. Regular reviews will be conducted to assess our progress against these measures, enabling the partnership to make decisions to ensure the five priorities are delivered.

Our governance and tracking will guarantee a robust decision-making process to achieve better outcomes for our residents with SEND.

The local area plan is a detailed implementation plan that sits under this and will be governed by the SEND Strategic board and reviewed quarterly. The SEND impact tracker will be used to monitor actions and outcomes under each of the themes. [Read our local plan here](#).

Governance Structure



Waltham Forest SEND Strategy

2024 – 2027

