

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 06 July 2026

Report Title

Educational Psychology Service – New model of delivery

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report provides Cabinet with an overview of the revised Educational Psychology Service (EPS) delivery model, setting out how the service will operate in practice following approval of the associated recurrent investment through the 2026/27 budget.

Members have previously considered and approved the investment. This report provides implementation-level detail and assurance around moving to the new model.

The new approach is designed to:

- Make sure the Council meets its legal duties on time.
- Speed up advice for Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments.
- Give schools more early help so issues do not escalate.
- Reduce the need to rely on temporary agency staff.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Note the revised Educational Psychology Service delivery model.
2. Note the approach to implementation, governance and assurance arrangements.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Glossary of Terms
- Appendix 2 Part A – Initial Equality Screening Assessment
- Appendix 3 Part B – Equality Analysis Form
- Appendix 4 Climate Impact Assessment

Background Papers

Schools White Paper: Every child achieving and thriving (Feb 2026)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Educational Psychology Service – New model of delivery

1. Background

- 1.1 The new delivery model builds on the significant work by the Rotherham Local Area SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) partnership since the Area SEND inspection in 2024. The new delivery model enables the Educational Psychology Service to meet the growing complex needs in a different way.
- 1.2 This has put pressure on the whole system, including schools, health services, and specialist provision. Educational psychologists have a vital role in improving learning, communication, and emotional well-being for children and young people. They work collaboratively with students, parents, and educators to:
- Assess learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia), behavioural challenges (e.g. Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder - ADHD), and developmental disorders (e.g., autism).
 - Develop tailored interventions and provide consultation and training.
 - Support schools during critical incidents and contribute to research and systemic improvement.
- 1.3 Rotherham’s Educational Psychology Service (EPS) delivers both statutory services (including psychological advice for Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans) and a traded offer to schools and other providers. Statutory work is highly resource-intensive, and each EHC assessment and advice typically requires 2.5 days of educational psychology time. The traded work is managed through service level agreements with educational settings and other providers.
- 1.4 Delays in Educational Psychology (EP) advice can have significant consequences. When advice is not provided promptly, children and young people may miss out on having their needs accurately identified. Schools are left without the resources, strategies, and specialist knowledge they need to provide effective support. Parents, in turn, face uncertainty and may struggle to support their child into the most appropriate educational setting.
- 1.5 One of the biggest pressures both nationally and in Rotherham has been the number of EHC assessments required. These are legal processes where the Council must gather professional advice within legal timescales. For each agreed EHC Plan, an Educational Psychologist must write psychological advice.
- 1.6 As demand has increased, it has become harder for the service to:
- meet these legal deadlines consistently
 - still provide early help and support to schools
 - manage staff workload and wellbeing concerns
 - increase its support for the Council’s inclusion priorities
- 1.7 In the past, when demand was high, early support work was sometimes deprioritised in order to deal with urgent statutory work. This national problem has also been reflected in Rotherham. This has made things more challenging over time, as more cases escalate to formal assessment.

1.8 The Council recognised these issues when setting the 2026/27 budget and agreed additional ongoing funding for the service. This report explains how the service will now operate using that funding.

2. Key Issues

2.1 The new EP delivery model is designed to:

- make sure the Council meets its statutory duties on time,
- speed up advice for EHC assessments,
- give schools more early help so issues do not escalate, and
- reduce the need to rely on temporary agency staff.

2.2 These statutory issues include:

2.2.1 1. Meeting statutory time limits on EHC plan duties

The Council must complete EHC assessments within strict timescales. The service needs enough educational psychology capacity to do this reliably. This is important because it helps teachers and parents understand the special needs of their children. This means that children can get the help they need. An EHC plan also provides additional resources so that those special needs can be met and it provides parents with options about schools.

2.2.2 2. Having a stable workforce

The service has relied too much on temporary and agency staff. This can be expensive and means children and families do not always get the consistent support they need. A stable workforce allows for deeper relationships to be built with schools, children and families. It also helps with staff morale, professional development and retention.

2.2.3 3. Providing early help

Schools need access to advice and support before problems become more serious. In the past, this work has often been hard to deliver amidst other pressures. The new delivery model will ensure that help is targeted at those areas with the highest levels of social and economic need. This is because these areas also tend to have the highest levels of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

2.2.3.1 This new way of working will also make it easier for the EP service to become part of the national requirement for there to be a local Experts at Hand (EAH) Team, which is outlined in the Schools White Paper 'Every child achieving and thriving' (2026)

2.2.3.2 The EAH team will be made up of educational psychologists, specialist teachers, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists. The new EP delivery model means that educational psychologists can be both part of this new team and make it easier for the work by the EAH to take place. The new model enables the

educational psychologists to provide more intensive early help whilst the EAH team can provide broader multi-disciplinary team support.

2.2.4 **4. Using resources better**

A more planned and stable model of delivery will make better use of funding, reduce agency costs, and provide a more predictable service. This will support schools as they implement the Schools White Paper (2026) inclusion goals. The balance between universal and targeted work means that those with the most needs can have access to support when they need it. It also ensures that all children and schools continue to have access to support where they need it. The new delivery model also means that there is more money available to help schools, children and families. This is both because of the increased funding and the reduced need to use agency educational psychologists, where the resultant savings can be used to provide more front-line services.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 The options for this service were already considered as part of the 2026/27 budget, so this report does not revisit those decisions. Instead, this section explains how the agreed model will work in practice.

3.2 **What the new model looks like**

3.2.1 The EP Service will focus on three main areas of work:

1. **Statutory work (legal duties):** This is the biggest part of the service and includes assessments and advice for EHC plans.
2. **Targeted early help:** Extra support for schools and areas where needs are highest, to prevent problems getting worse.
3. **Universal and traded support**
Ongoing advice, training and support that schools can access.

3.2.2 These three areas are designed to work together so the service is more balanced and does not just react to pressure.

3.3 **How the service will be balanced**

3.3.1 In the past, when demand increased, nearly all capacity was pulled into statutory work.

3.3.2 This meant early help and support for schools reduced which often led to more children needing formal assessments later. The new model is different because it will plan further ahead for statutory demand, protect more time for early help and set clear limits on what can be delivered, so the service is more consistent in its delivery.

3.3.3 Around 1,800 days per year of educational psychologist time will be set aside for statutory work (EHC assessments). This is to make sure that legal deadlines are

met, advice is provided on time, and the Council avoids legal and reputational risks.

3.3.4 To support this, the Council will recruit two additional permanent Educational Psychologists that will reduce reliance on agency staff, give families and schools more consistent support and improve oversight and quality.

3.4 **How staff will be used**

3.4.1 Staff will be deployed more clearly and consistently. The key changes are the planning of statutory work, permanent staff forming the core of the service, time for early help work being protected, and traded work being based on what can be delivered consistently. This is a shift away from how the service has had to operate in the past.

3.5 **Targeted early help**

3.4.1 Around 120 days per year will be set aside specifically for early intervention. This will focus on schools with the highest levels of need, children at risk of needing more intensive support and key transition points (for example, starting or moving school).

3.5.2 Support will include working directly with schools to understand and manage needs, short-term, practical help to stabilise situations and helping schools put the right support in place early.

3.5.3 The aim is to deal with issues earlier, so fewer children need formal assessments later.

3.5 **Support for all schools (Universal and traded offer)**

3.6.1 The service will continue to provide support to all schools, including advice and consultation, training for staff, help with planning support for children, critical incident support and wider work to improve inclusion.

3.6.2 This will be delivered through a mix of Council-funded work, grant funding and traded services schools can buy into. Overall, around 1,200 days per year will be available for this work.

3.7 **How performance will be monitored**

3.7.1 The delivery of SEND services receives oversight and scrutiny from both the Place board and Improving Lives Select Commission.

3.7.2 The model will be formally reviewed after its first year to make sure it is working as intended, early help is making a difference, and the service is sustainable. Key success indicators will include an increase in school attendance and reduction in exclusion.

3.8 Implementation

3.8.1 The revised delivery model will be introduced in phases to ensure a smooth transition and no disruption to statutory services.

3.8.2 Since April, the focus has been on preparing the service. This includes recruiting additional Educational Psychologists, reviewing workloads, and working with schools to explain the changes and support planning.

3.8.3 The new model will be implemented from September 2026. This will introduce a clearer balance between statutory work, early help, and support for schools, with protected time for early intervention and reduced reliance on agency staff.

3.8.4 During implementation, performance will be closely monitored, particularly around statutory timescales for EHC assessments and the quality and timeliness of support provided to schools and families.

3.8.5 The model will be reviewed after its first year to ensure it is working effectively, supporting early intervention, and delivering a sustainable service.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 Engagement with schools and settings is taking place during the summer term to support implementation of the revised model from September 2026.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Key milestones include:

- Council budget approval: March 2026
- Implementation of fees and charges: April 2026
- Recruitment to additional EPS posts: by September 2026
- Full implementation of revised model: September 2026

5.2 Oversight will be provided through existing Children and Young People's Services governance arrangements.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 Additional budget of £453k has been approved by the Council for the implementation of the revised EPS delivery model as set out in this report. The proposed investment will enable a sustainable model that delivers statutory obligations, targeted interventions, and a reduced but viable traded offer:

- Statutory Work: Increase capacity to 1,800 activity days per year, ensuring compliance with statutory deadlines.
- Targeted Intervention: Introduce a new offer focused on inclusion and early help in schools with the greatest need, reducing future statutory demand.
- Traded Services: Maintain a reduced offer (1,221 activity days), balancing income generation with statutory priorities.

- 6.2 The impact of the new model and additional investment is as follows:
- **Staffing levels:** increasing the statutory and targeted offer would require an increase in EP staffing capacity of 2 full time equivalent at an additional estimated cost of £134k
 - **Traded Service Offer:** under the revised model, the capacity to provide traded Educational Psychology services to schools would reduce from 2,074 to 1,221 activity days. Should overall demand for traded EP service exceed 1,221 days, other sources of traded capacity are available to schools. The resulting reduction in budgeted income from schools - estimated at £319k, due to capacity being redirected to statutory and targeted demand - would be fully offset by the proposed additional investment. The approved fees and charges from April 2026 are based on the revised traded offer and activity levels.

6.3 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 The duty placed upon the Local Authority to secure an EHC needs assessment is detailed in Section 36 of the Children and Families Act 2014 [‘the Act’]. An EHC needs assessment is an assessment of the educational, health care and social care needs of a child or young person.

7.2 The Special Educational Needs and Disability regulations 2014 [‘the Regulations’] set out the detailed requirements placed upon local authorities for assessing children and young people’s education, health and care needs and where necessary drawing up EHC plans.

7.3 Regulation 8 of the Regulations outlines the duty to co-operate in EHC needs assessments. The statutory timeframe for providing expert advice and assistance is 6 weeks from the date on which the request was received and compliance with such a request is statutory.

7.4 The SEND Code of Practice 2015, paragraph 9.52 also states: -

“Advice and information requested by the local authority must be provided within six weeks of the request, and should be provided more quickly wherever possible, to enable a timely process. (This is subject to the exemptions set out in paragraph 9.42.)”

7.5 The Regulations also impose statutory timescales upon the Local Authority in relation to notification of a decision that it is not necessary for special educational provision to be made for a child or young person in accordance with an EHC plan. This notification must be given as soon as practicable and in any event within 16 weeks of the Local Authority receiving the request for an EHC needs assessment.

- 7.6 The Local Authority must send a finalised EHC plan as soon as practicable and in any event within 20 weeks of the Local Authority receiving the request for an EHC needs assessment.
- 7.7 Non-compliance with the statutory timescale of 6 weeks for the provision of EP advice will also have a direct impact on the overall statutory timescales set out above and risks non-compliance by the Local Authority in respect of those duties.
- 7.8 Regulation 10(4)(a)-(d) of the Regulations specifies lawful reasons as to why the Local Authority does not have to comply with the time limits referenced at paragraphs 7.5 And 7.6. Long waiting lists and staff shortages are not lawful reasons for non-compliance with statutory timescales.
- 7.9 The avenues of formal complaint and redress available in the event of non-compliance with the statutory timeframes include appeal to the First Tier SEND Tribunal, Application for Judicial Review and/or complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- 7.10 All of the above pose significant financial and reputational risk to the Local Authority and may directly impact upon the child or young person and their family.
- 7.11 The revised model supports compliance with statutory duties outlined by ensuring timely delivery of Educational Psychology advice within the EHC needs assessment process.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 The model includes recruitment to permanent Educational Psychologist posts and strengthens workforce stability, professional development and retention.
- 8.2 The Council has a statutory duty to meet the six-week timeframe for psychological advice as part of the EHC needs assessment process under the Children and Families Act 2014.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 Improved capacity and timeliness of Educational Psychology input support earlier identification of need, more timely access to support and improved outcomes for children, young people and families.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 An Equality Screening Assessment has been completed. Improved timeliness and consistency of EPS input supports equitable access to statutory assessment and support for children with SEND.
- 10.2 Both an Initial Equality Screening Assessment and an Equality Analysis have been completed and are attached as Appendices 1 and 2.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 No significant additional carbon impacts are anticipated, as service changes relate to workforce capacity rather than physical estate or travel.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 The revised model supports clearer and more sustainable partnership working with schools and other partners through improved EPS capacity and targeted support where need is greatest.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Key risks relate to workforce recruitment and adjustment to revised traded arrangements. These will be mitigated through phased implementation, proactive engagement with schools and ongoing monitoring through Children and Young People’s Services (CYPS) governance.

14. Accountable Officers

Niall Devlin – Service Director, Education & Inclusion

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	17/06/26
Executive Director of Corporate Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	10/06/26
Service Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	10/06/26

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