

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Lives Select Commission – 21 July 2026

Report Title

Rotherham Local SEND Reform Plan – System Transformation Update

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

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

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

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

In response to the Schools White Paper and associated national government policy Local areas are required to develop Local SEND Reform Plans to address rising demand, reduce unsustainable high-needs financial deficits, and fix a fragmented system.

Rotherham's Local SEND Reform Plan sets out a three-year transformation programme (2026–2029) to reshape the local SEND system. It responds to:

- Rapid growth in demand (EHCPs projected to rise to 5,564 by 2029)
- Increasing complexity of need, particularly autism and communication needs
- Rising persistent and severe absence
- Increasing waiting times for services and pressure on specialist provision
- Unsustainable financial pressures within the High Needs Block

The plan represents a fundamental shift in approach, moving from a system driven by statutory processes to one focused on:

- Earlier intervention in mainstream settings
- Strengthened inclusion and workforce capability
- Multi-agency delivery (Experts at Hand model)
- Improved parental confidence and system consistency
- Better value for money and financial sustainability

The programme is jointly owned across the Council, NHS partners, schools, and families, with strong co-production underpinning its design and delivery.

Recommendations

That the Improving Lives Select Commission note the draft Local SEND Reform plan and ambition of the Vision and Priorities.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Draft Local SEND Reform Plan

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Rotherham Local SEND Reform Plan – System Transformation Update

1. Background

- 1.1 Demand for SEND support has increased significantly in recent years, with rising EHCP volumes and complexity of need placing pressure across education, health and care systems.
- 1.2 Key system pressures include:
- Long waiting times for therapies
 - Increasing persistent and severe absence and emotionally based school avoidance
 - Variation in inclusive practice across schools
 - Growing reliance on high-cost specialist placements
- 1.3 Without reform, demand and cost pressures are projected to increase significantly, with High Needs Block expenditure rising unsustainably.

2. Key Issues

2.1 A system under pressure:

The current system is reactive, with support often accessed too late, leading to escalation into statutory processes and poorer outcomes.

2.2 Inconsistent inclusion in mainstream education:

Variation in school confidence and capability to deliver an effective graduated response results in unequal experiences for children and families and may cause unnecessary demand for EHCPs.

2.3 Workforce and access challenges:

Limited access to early multi-disciplinary support contributes to delays, inconsistency, workforce capability and lower parental confidence.

2.4 The Reform Model – Key Changes:

2.4.1 Earlier intervention through Experts at Hand (EAH):

A consultation-led, multi-disciplinary model bringing specialist expertise into mainstream settings at the earliest point of need. This support will be delivered at the whole setting level (School, Nursery or College).

2.4.2 Expansion of inclusion bases:

Significant growth in specialist provision within mainstream schools to support local, inclusive placements. This will include specialist inclusion bases previously called Integrated Resources (IRs) and new inclusion

support bases which will be designed to bridge the gap between mainstream classrooms and specialist provision.

2.4.3 Stronger workforce capability:

Investment in specialist roles to support the workforce and accessible professional development to improve confidence and consistency across settings.

2.4.3 Co-produced system with families:

Greater emphasis on parental confidence, voice and experience as core measures of success.

2.4.4 Improved data, accountability and quality assurance:

A single system view through dashboards that are communicated regularly with education and health partners. Implementation of a robust co-produced Quality Assurance framework with a parental confidence measure. Clearer expectations and escalation through transparent governance.

2.4.5 Financial sustainability:

A shift to mainstream provision (which offers significantly better value) to moderate cost growth and reduce reliance on independent placements.

2.5 What success will look like:

2.5.1 By 2029, the system will demonstrate:

- More children supported in mainstream and with SEN Support
- Reduced rate of EHCP growth and tribunal activity
- Improved attendance and reduced exclusions
- Faster access to therapies (70% within 18 weeks)
- Increased parental confidence
- Slower growth in High Needs spending

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 The recommended option is that Improving Lives Select Commission note the draft Local SEND Reform Plan and endorse the ambition and priorities. The draft Local SEND Reform plan meets the requirement set out in national government policy in response to the Schools White Paper. The reform plan provides a credible, evidence-based route to system stability and improved outcomes.

3.2 Not transforming the current system in line with the draft Local SEND Reform Plan would result in:

- Not meeting the requirement set out in national government policy in response to the Schools White Paper
- Continued escalation in demand and cost

- Increased pressure on specialist provision
- Worsening outcomes for children and young people

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 Extensive co-production has shaped the plan, including:

- Parent/carer engagements
- Schools, trusts, Post 16 and early years providers
- Health and care partners
- Children and young people

4.2 This provides strong system ownership and legitimacy.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Delivery is phased over three years:

- **Year 1 (2026–27):** Establish foundations (EAH, inclusion base pilots, data systems)
- **Year 2 (2027–28):** Scale delivery and embed consistent practice
- **Year 3 (2028–29):** Full implementation and measurable system impact

5.2 Governance is through:

- SEND Executive (strategic oversight)
- SENDAP Partnership Board (delivery and performance)
- Senior Responsible Officer (overall accountability)

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 There are no direct financial implications in this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 There are no direct legal implications in this report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no direct HR implications in this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The reform programme is designed to deliver:

- Earlier and more effective support
- Greater inclusion in local mainstream settings
- Improved attendance, engagement and outcomes
- Better experiences for families

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 The plan strengthens inclusive provision and reduces inequalities, supporting children's right to education and meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 Increased local provision will reduce travel distances and transport demand.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 Delivery requires continued strong partnership across:

- Council services
- NHS and ICB
- Schools and trusts
- Parent and community organisations

- 12.2 The success of the plan depends on collective system accountability.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 Key Risks:

- Workforce recruitment and retention challenges
- Delays in expanding inclusion bases
- Inconsistent implementation across schools
- Continued growth in demand
- Data quality and timeliness issues

- 13.2 **Mitigation:**

- Joint workforce planning with health partners
- Strong programme governance and escalation
- Co-produced quality assurance and data systems
- Phased delivery and continuous monitoring

Accountable Officer

Niall Devlin – Service Director, Education & Inclusion

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

	Name	Date
The Executive Director with responsibility for this report	Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services	30/06/26
Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People - Councillor Cusworth	09/07/26

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