

SEND

JOINT COMMISSIONING STRATEGY

2025-2030

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our vision as a local area partnership is to provide high quality, inclusive services and to use our collective resource effectively; promoting inclusion and achieving the best possible outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.



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SEND in Gloucestershire & the National Landscape

In Gloucestershire, we are ambitious for all our children and young people, including those with additional or special educational needs and disabilities.

Gloucestershire benefits from coterminosity of the Integrated Care Board and County Council, and commissions a single hospital trust and single community health trust.

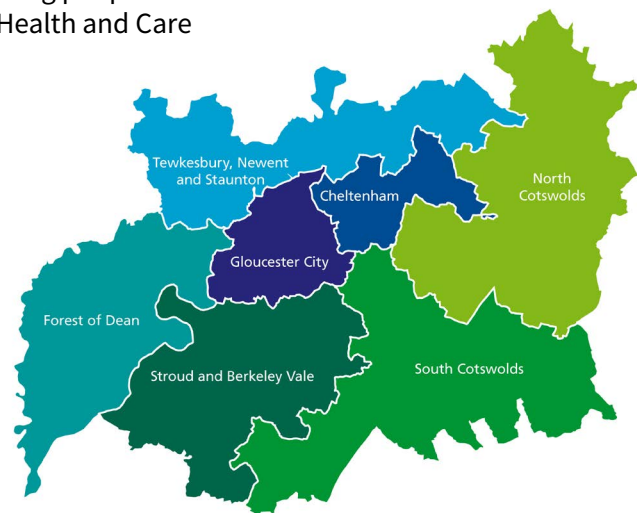
Our education landscape is more varied, with academies and maintained schools, special schools and independents schools, plus two further education college providers, and an array of training providers.

Our localities are diverse and varied; this creates intra county challenges and opportunities; these need to be recognised throughout all county-wide plans and strategies, including those considering children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). For example, children in Gloucester locality might have

access to very different social interaction than those who live in a more rural locality, such as Cotswolds.

The number of children and young people receiving SEND support in Gloucestershire has been increasing over the last 5 years, as has the number of children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Locally, 46% of children and young people with an EHCP attend a mainstream school; 25% attend a maintained special school; the remaining proportion are in further education, early years settings, alternative provisions, and independent settings.



The SEND National Landscape

The SEND Landscape is ever-changing. There is a recognition that the 2014 SEND reforms have not been successful; this is reflected across a number of national reports.

Nationally, challenges in the SEND system could be broadly summarised as:

- Significant increases in the number of children identified as having SEND, especially those with EHCPs.
- Despite an increase in high needs funding, the system is failing to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- The system has become financially unsustainable.
- Parents' confidence in the system is in decline.

Root causes of these issues and challenges are described as systemic and it is widely considered that reform of the SEND system is both essential and unavoidable.

Where We Are Now

Gloucestershire County Council and NHS Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Gloucestershire.

In December 2023, the Gloucestershire SEND Local Area Partnership was inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

There were many areas of good practice identified such as our Local Offer, co-produced with families through the Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum; provision for children's additional needs in early years; and the SEND Inclusion Local Area Partnership Board, amongst others.

The inspection also identified four areas to address, as set out below, if we are to achieve our ambition to deliver consistently good experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission asked that the partnership update and publish its strategic plans based on the inspection report.

Our SEND improvement plan incorporates our response to the recommendations and was published in April 2024.

The Local Area Partnership Board oversees the delivery of the improvement plan.



1. Leaders in the ICB & the Local Authority (LA) should strengthen **multi-agency working** between education, health, & social care providers in order to:
 - Identify/assess needs more quickly
 - Improve education transitions
 - Help children and young people (CYP) access provision that meets their needs
 - Improve Preparation for Adulthood (PFA)
 - Communicate decision-making processes with all stakeholders

2. Leaders should work together to strengthen & embed the **quality assurance framework** around all EHCPs, including:
 - Quality & depth of all contributions
 - Reducing health assessment waits
 - Increasing timeliness & quality of needs assessments
 - Increasing timeliness & quality of EHCPs & annual reviews
 - EHCPs should consider information shared by all services providing support

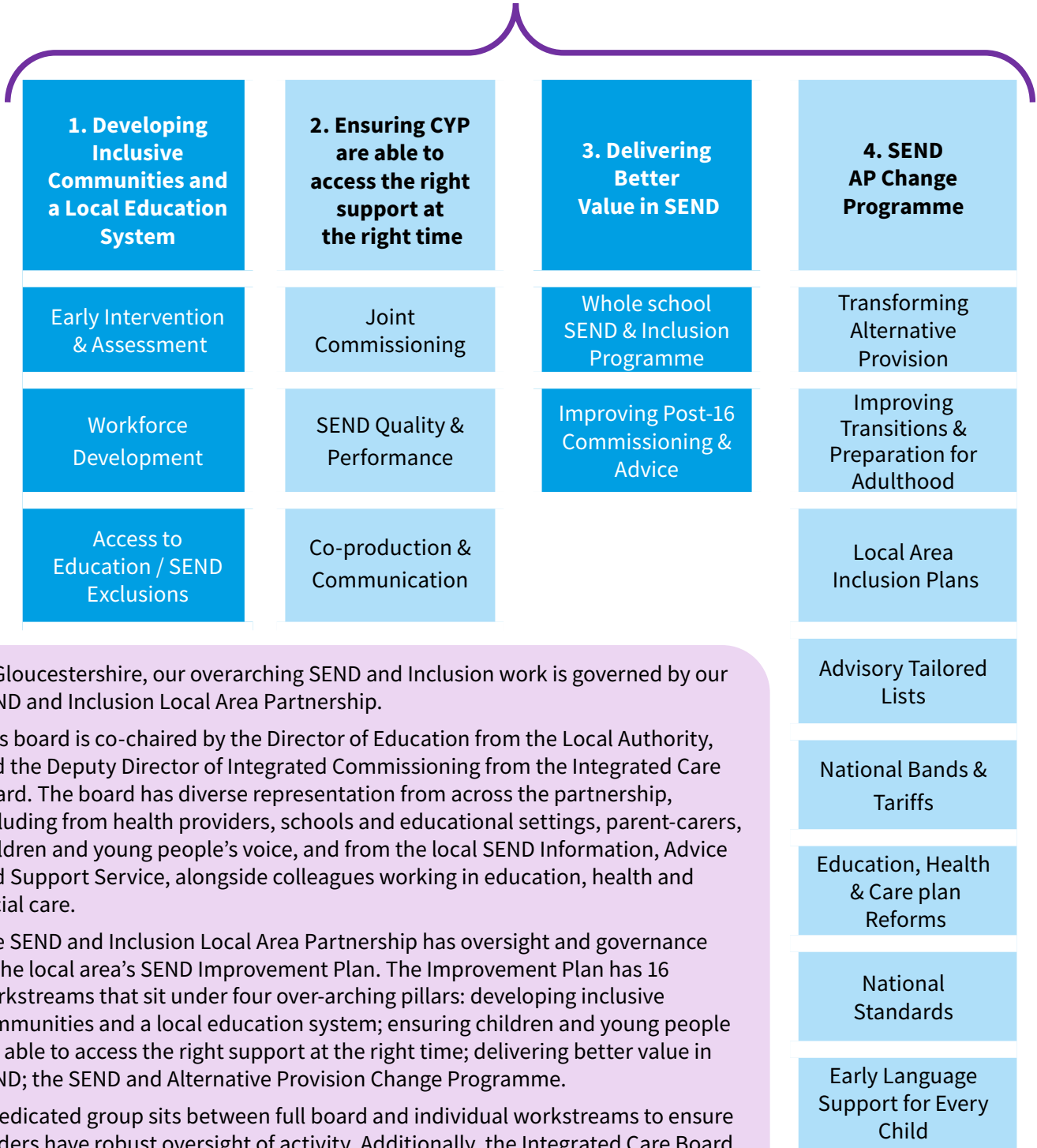
3. Leaders in education should continue to review the breadth & offer of **specialist places** for children with SEND, in order to inform **commissioning & investment** in **specialist provision** to improve the experiences & outcomes of children & young people & their families

4. The partnership should further develop their **strategic plans** to include families in partnership projects to embed their voice & create a model of true **co-production**. The monitoring of projects & interventions should be more **inclusive & effectively communicated** with stakeholders, to create a shared culture of driving improvements for children, young people with SEND and their families

SEND Governance in Gloucestershire

SEND and Inclusion Local Area Partnership Board
 Co-Chairs: **Kirsten Harrison** (Director of Education),
Helen Ford (Deputy Director, Integrated Commissioning)

SILAP Programme Management Group



In Gloucestershire, our overarching SEND and Inclusion work is governed by our SEND and Inclusion Local Area Partnership.

This board is co-chaired by the Director of Education from the Local Authority, and the Deputy Director of Integrated Commissioning from the Integrated Care Board. The board has diverse representation from across the partnership, including from health providers, schools and educational settings, parent-carers, children and young people’s voice, and from the local SEND Information, Advice and Support Service, alongside colleagues working in education, health and social care.

The SEND and Inclusion Local Area Partnership has oversight and governance of the local area’s SEND Improvement Plan. The Improvement Plan has 16 workstreams that sit under four over-arching pillars: developing inclusive communities and a local education system; ensuring children and young people are able to access the right support at the right time; delivering better value in SEND; the SEND and Alternative Provision Change Programme.

A dedicated group sits between full board and individual workstreams to ensure leaders have robust oversight of activity. Additionally, the Integrated Care Board has a dedicated SEND Programme Board which allows them to feed up and into the individual improvement plan workstreams.

Assessment of Need

In developing this strategy, we consulted with a range of stakeholders including our Parent Carer Forum, Future Me Gloucestershire, Education Services, social care colleagues, the designated social care officer, allied health professionals, service leads, commissioners, finance teams, and our Designated Medical Officer.

Consultations were conducted through 1 to 1 conversations that included structured questions and the flexibility for free-flowing discussions.

We brought the views of parent carers, partners and stakeholders alongside our SEND data to develop our needs analysis which underpins the priorities we have set out in this joint commissioning strategy.

In Gloucestershire there were **6,411** children and young people with an **EHCP** as of January 2025. This was an Increase of 9% since July 2024.



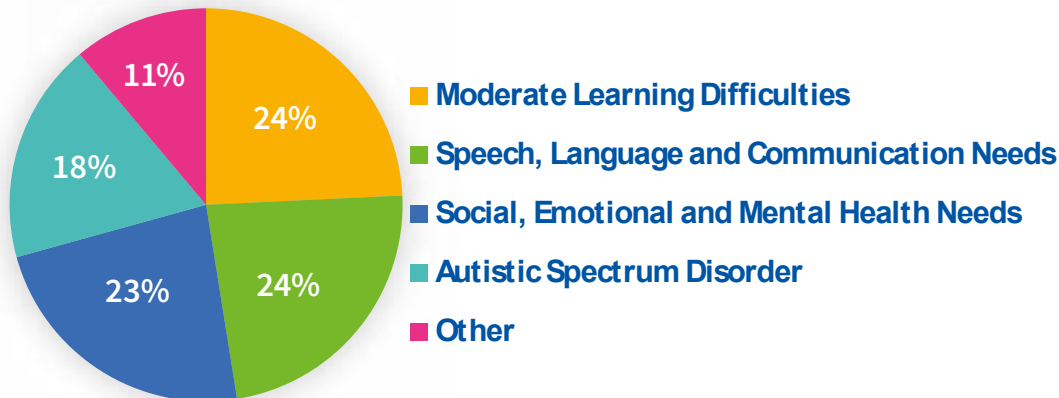
In 2023 there were

1436

requests for statutory assessment. This was an increase of 28.7% since 2022.



PREVALENCE OF NEED IN EHCPs



Data for the SEN 2 Census will only record the primary & secondary needs: children sometimes have multiple needs.

Children in Care

23% of children in care in Gloucestershire have an EHCP.

26% receive SEN Support.



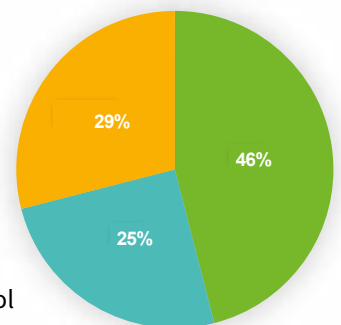
Adult Social Care

In March 2024 there were **342** young people receiving support from Adult Social Care in Gloucestershire.

72% were recognised as having learning disabilities and were receiving payments for supported living or direct payments to finance their daily care.

EDUCATION SETTINGS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SEND

■ Mainstream School
■ Special School
■ Other: Early Years; Further Education; Alternative Provision; Independent



Referrals to Community Health Services

Children’s Speech and Language Therapy

In 2023/2024 the service had **3758** referrals and **3415** children and young people on the service caseload.

Safe waiting is supported through a digital app service called **SHARE**.

CAMHS Learning Disability

The CAMHS Learning Disability team supports children with a range of learning disabilities including ASD who attend specific special schools.

In 2022/23 there were **189** referrals to the service this rose to **232** in 2023/24.

Children’s Occupational Therapy


In 2023/2024 referrals reduced to **1673** (following a peak at **3627** in 2021/2022).

The number of children and young people on the service caseload fell to **1484** in 2023/2024 due to improved flow and reduced waiting times.

Children’s Physiotherapy

There were **3476** referrals into the service in 2023/2024, a slight decrease on the previous year’s **3588**.

There were **10,583** contacts made with children and young people – and their families – in 2023/2024

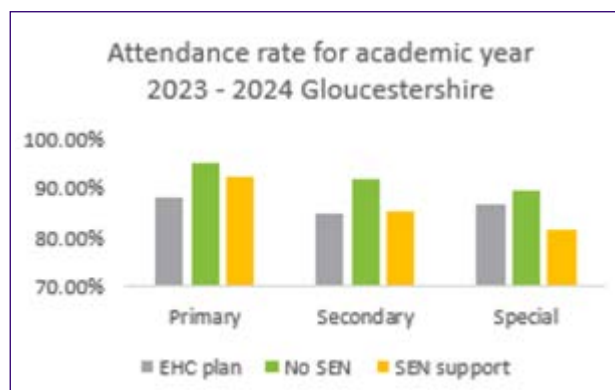
| Educational Outcomes  | Children with SEND Support (local) | Children with SEND Support (national) | Children with an EHCP (local) | Children with an EHCP (national) |
|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Early Years <i>% of children meeting the “Good Level of Development”</i> | 21.7 | 24.3 | 5.2 | 3.8 |
| Key Stage 2 <i>% of children achieving expected level – or higher – in reading, writing, maths</i> | 20 | 26 | 10 | 9 |
| Key Stage 4 <i>Attainment 8 Scores</i> | 33.5 | 33.3 | 13.5 | 14 |

Attendance and Exclusions

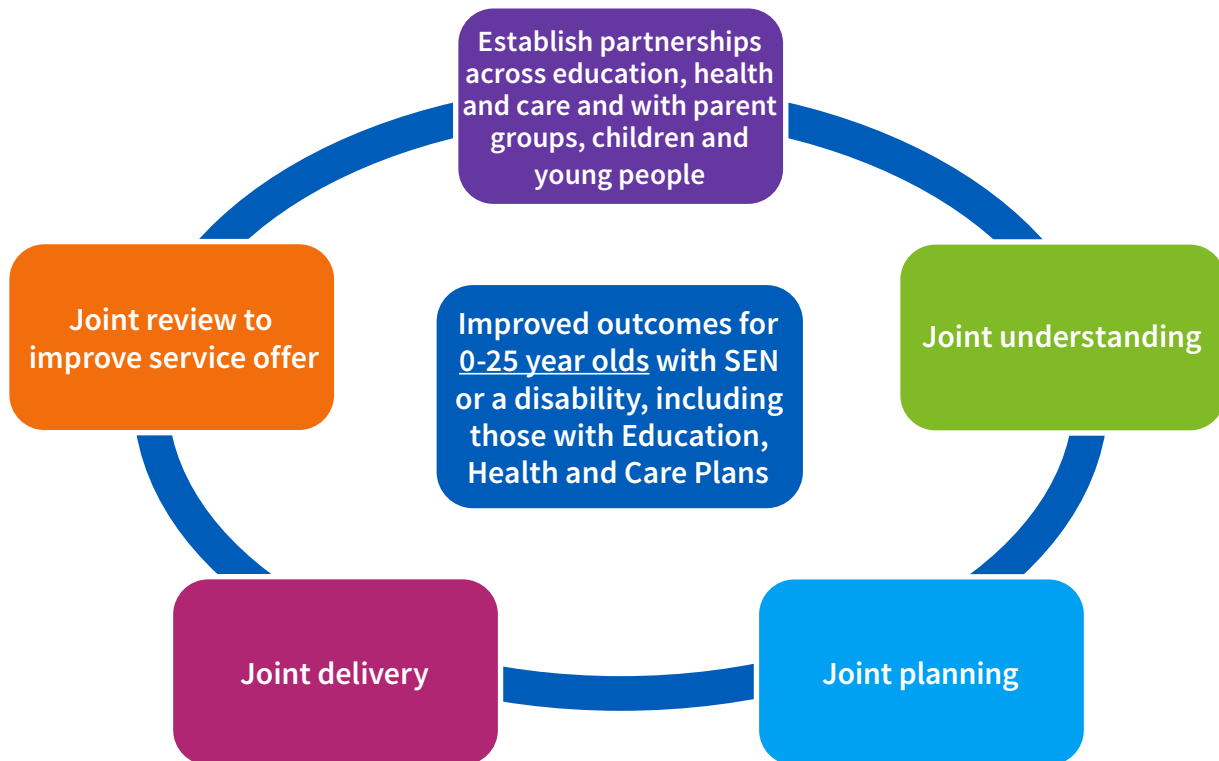
A higher rate of children and young people with SEND are persistently absent from a school or setting.

In 2022-2023, the overall persistent absence rate for pupils without SEN was **17.0** compared to **35.0** for children with an EHCP and 30.7 for children accessing SEND support. This is similar to the national averages at 36.0 and 31.1 respectively.

Children and young people with additional needs are more likely to receive an exclusion than those with none. This has increased for children with both an EHCP and SEN support in recent years.



Joint Commissioning for SEND



Joint commissioning for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is a strategic approach where different organisations across Gloucestershire – including our local authority and our health services, will work together to plan, purchase and deliver services for children and young people with SEND.

This strategy aims to ensure that services are holistic, effective, and tailored to meet the specific needs of these individuals.

For us, the key aspects of joint commissioning for SEND include:

Analysis: Using data sources to understand and assess what is needed locally.

Collaborative Planning: The Local Area Partnership is committed to co-production. As such, we will come together to plan services that address the comprehensive needs of children and young people with SEND.

Shared Resources: By pooling resources and expertise, we will provide more effective and coordinated support.

Improved Outcomes: The goal is to deliver better outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Gloucestershire by ensuring that services are well-integrated and responsive to their needs.

Governance and Accountability: Strong leadership and clear governance structures are essential to ensure that joint commissioning efforts are effective and accountable.

Review: Assessing and measuring the outcomes and impact of our work to inform ongoing planning and priorities.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in our Local SEND System

Through use of available data – including the voice gathered in consultation for this strategy and from the inspection report – the following have been identified across the partnership:

Strengths

- Leaders have a shared vision of excellence
- There are ambitious plans for improvement across the local area partnership
- The partnership has set out clear priorities and robust arrangements for governance
- There are a number of support measures in place whilst young people wait for assessments
- There are strong examples of effective partnership working and co-production across the area

Weaknesses

- More support is needed for young people with SEND to access social interactions
- More needs to be done to create open, supportive, trusted relationships using shared language
- Our young people need more support to gain autonomy, resilience and independence
- Increasing demand for special school places with limited places available
- More support is needed with Social, Emotional and Mental Health; Moderate Learning Difficulties; Speech, Language and Communication; and Neurodiversity needs
- Mainstream schools need to provide tailored support for children with SEND
- Poorer educational outcomes and attendance, and higher exclusions for young people with SEND
- Better SEND support is needed for children in care
- There are system-wide gaps in early intervention and use of a graduated approach to meeting need
- The needs of children and young people are becoming more complex
- Improved joint working between organisations
- Challenges of children with complex needs and who is responsible for supporting them in school
- There are inconsistent transition arrangements across the local area

Opportunities

- Support to gain autonomy, resilience and independence including preparation for adult life
- Providing our children and young people with help and support at the earliest opportunity
- Ensuring the local area is able to respond to a rising complexity in the needs of children and young people
- Delivering services to support Moderate Learning Difficulties; Speech, Language and Communication Needs; Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs; and neurodiversity needs
- Providing tailored support in mainstream settings
- Developing clear pathways and processes for multi-agency decision making and partnership working

Threats

- Workforce strain
- Financial unsustainability
- System becomes adversarial
- Rising youth unemployment rates
- Limited social opportunities in some communities
- Regulatory and Compliance Risks
- Cost of living crisis and post-COVID challenges

Strategic Priorities for Joint Commissioning

As a local area partnership, we recognise that children and young people with SEND are – first and foremost – children and people.

They come from all backgrounds, cultures, faiths and ethnicities, as well as having a diverse range of SEND that intersect.

We recognise that – for some people – those factors will be protective and enabling and, for others, they will amplify the challenges they face.

We will use our equalities data and impact assessments to ensure that our joint commissioning approach is aimed at maximising access, inclusion and equity for all groups.



Our Strategic Priorities for Joint Commissioning have been set based on the data from our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment; the views of stakeholders gathered through consultation; and with a focus on aligning with the priorities identified in our *2022-2025 SEND Strategy, and our 2022-2025 Inclusion Strategy*.

Priority 1

Ensure outcomes for children and young people with SEND are ambitious and achievable, with the right support and information accessible when needed.

Links to SEND Strategy Priority 1, 2, 3

Priority 2

Across the partnership, embed a graduated approach to meeting needs, providing children and young people with help and support at the earliest opportunity.

Links to Inclusion Strategy Priority 2

Priority 3

With data showing us rising need in these areas, understand the interconnections between Moderate Learning Difficulties; Speech, Language & Communication Needs; Social, Emotional & Mental Health Needs; & Neurodiversity. Improve access to education through Multi-agency working for these groups. *Links to Inclusion Strategy Priority 3 and 4*

Priority 4

Provide tailored support for/in mainstream settings through a multi-agency inclusion toolkit, and through workforce development across the partnership.

Links to Inclusion Strategy Priority 1 and 4

Priority 5

Ensure the local area is able to respond to a rising complexity in the needs of children & young people

Strategic Priorities for Joint Commissioning: *from Objectives to First Steps*

With the strategic priorities planned out, we will develop detailed plans for each of the priorities and will form working groups to deliver the actions we agree to take.

A Joint Commissioning workstream is already included within the local area improvement plan and will govern the progress of the planning group.

Key to each group will be the following first steps, and the accompanying enabling priorities.



1. Ensure outcomes for children and young people with SEND are ambitious and achievable, with the right support and information accessible when needed.

Ensure seamless transitions across all services and stages.



Development of county-wide transition pathways across services; a shared understanding of what transition means.

Ensure young people have the skills to prepare them for adult life and all potential independence at an early stage, ensuring appropriate adult social care support where needed.



An agreed position on Preparation for Adulthood (PFA) with clear roles, responsibilities and sign-up from required organisations.

Ensure children and young people can engage in social interactions.



Learning from young people about current barriers to accessing social interaction; building the right support and opportunity.

Help children & young people with the resilience & support they need to access & attend their education, employment or training. Encourage and enable them to share their views and shape the support they need.



Review the approach to the commissioning of supported living and employment and education of young people with SEND.

2. Across the partnership, embed a graduated approach to meeting needs, providing children and young people with help and support at the earliest opportunity.

Develop a system-wide understanding of universal, targeted, specialist support, providing families with confidence in LOI.



Develop the levels of intervention guidance for the partnership and ensure strong, shared local area ownership and use.

Have a more systematic approach to recognising, and responding to, external factors that can impact on a child or family, such as trauma.



Equip colleagues with a robust understanding of contributors to behaviour; ensure signposting, support and services are available to support.

Strive to ensure needs are identified when emerging, with provision available in a timely manner.



Whilst working to improve waiting times, explore innovative waiting list initiatives for providing support.

Use the graduated approach robustly, consistently & with confidence, to build resilience and sustainable outcomes for children without the need for an EHCP.



Ensure settings use a Graduated Approach at the earliest opportunity and are given the skills and knowledge to use it flexibly.

3. With data showing us rising need in these areas, understand the interconnections between Moderate Learning Difficulties; Speech, Language & Communication Needs; Social, Emotional & Mental Health Needs; & Neurodiversity. Through Multi-agency working, improve access to education for these groups.

Develop improved partnership understanding of the interconnections between these areas to better inform our joint commissioning.



Conduct a research project and report, with a gap analysis following.

Upskill the workforce to understand these connections and their ability to support them, ensuring trust & relationships.



When the above is completed, feed this into workforce development across the system.

Empower CYP & families with strategies to meet need, ensuring we have communication channels & signposting to support this.



When above is completed, develop training, resources, support for families, place on the local offer; ensure it is shared through comms.

Ensure services are joined-up and well connected to meet a range of diverse needs.



Gap analysis of where services are not currently able to meet need. Analysis of total resources from each area to inform commissioning.

4. Provide tailored support for/in mainstream settings through a multi-agency inclusion toolkit, and through workforce development across the partnership.

Ensure children feel supported to access mainstream education as much as possible.



Through the Inclusion Framework, help schools create inclusive learning environments which remove unnecessary barriers.

Ensure the workforce feel empowered, supported & knowledgeable about meeting SEND needs.



Develop a robust training offer for schools so everyone understands their responsibilities within SEND.

Help families to better understand Ordinary Available Provision & have trust in it within their child's setting.



Through clear comms, resources and training, develop clear understanding of ordinarily available provision and reasonable adjustments for families.

Ensure services are available in the places where they can have maximum impact.



Jointly commission initiatives – using current pilots as examples – to give mainstream settings support when they need it.

5. Ensure the local area is able to respond to a rising complexity in the needs of children & young people.

Make special school places available to those who need them.



Through strategic priority 4, raise confidence in the ability of mainstream settings to meet needs and provide reasonable adjustments.

Ensure roles & responsibilities for children with complex needs are clear system-wide; this includes financial responsibilities.



Review current decision-making groups/processes/policies; use these to produce a jointly-owned position on individual level funding.

Enable services to work collaboratively to meet rising complexity, streamlining processes for joint decision making.



Use data to inform joint commissioning decisions; define opportunities for joint commissioning of services.

Ensure complex health needs are not a barrier to accessing education.



Allocating of service or individual health resources to meet identified health needs to access education.

Enabling Principles



This strategy, the underpinning plan, and the work behind it cannot be successful without a partnership wide commitment to the following key enablers:

Co-Production



Design, develop and commission services in partnership with children, young people, and families to ensure commissioning decisions reflect their experiences, ambitions, and expectations.

Commitment to Tri-Working



From the start, education, health, and social care are committed to working together – alongside the Voluntary/Community Sector and other partners -to ensure shared responsibility for each strategic priority.

Resource and Finances



Allocate and use resources efficiently to gain maximum value and benefit to children and young people. The partnership will identify and plan resource allocation and additional investment for subsequent years.

Governance and Accountability



This strategy, and the delivery of it, will be governed through the local area improvement plan; the SEND and Inclusion Local Area Partnership will monitor progress of its delivery.

Monitoring and Evaluation



We will embed a continuous cycle of monitoring, assessing, planning, doing, and reviewing to ensure high-quality, evidence-based activities under each priority.

Escalation Routes



Each strategic priority needs a clear, agreed-upon escalation process to resolve disagreements quickly and professionally. These routes will form part of the Joint Commissioning Plan.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SEND

- [Gloucestershire County Council Education Inclusion Strategy](#)
- [Gloucestershire County Council SEND Strategy](#)
- [ISOS Partnership Research Paper on Pressures in the SEND System](#)
- [NAO – Support for Children and Young People with SEND](#)
- [Public Accounts Committee: Support for Children and Young People with SEND](#)
- [Education Select Committee: Solving the SEND Crisis](#)



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