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**Title of meeting:** Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education

**Subject:** Annual Update on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Portsmouth

**Date of meeting:** 9 January 2025

**Report by:** Cate Mullen, Head of Inclusion

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Suzy Horton, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education

**Wards affected:** All

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**1. Requested by**

1.1 Ordinary council meeting of 16th July 2024; agenda item 14(a) where it was recorded that the Council requests that an annual update paper on SEND is taken to the Cabinet Member Decision Meeting for Children, Families and Education as well as the Health and Wellbeing Board (paragraph 7, amendment to the notice of motion).

**2. Purpose**

2.1 To provide an annual update about Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Portsmouth.

**3. Overview**

3.1 A SEND and AP (Alternative Provision) strategy has recently been redeveloped, following the end date of the previous SEND strategy being reached. The objectives of the strategy are as follows:

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**Strategic Objective 1:**

Meeting children's needs through universal services and Ordinarily Available Provision

**Strategic Objective 2:**

Timely and high-quality education and support for children with EHCPs

**Strategic Objective 3:**

Developing the workforce to meet children's SEND needs

**Strategic Objective 4:**

Meeting the needs of children and young people with neurodiversity and their families

**Strategic Objective 5:**

Improving children's social and emotional wellbeing in education

**Strategic Objective 6:**

Enabling young people to prepare for adulthood

**Strategic Objective 7:**

Delivering high quality Alternative Provision

- 3.2 Workstreams are already in place for most of these areas with groups to support objective two and seven to be convened by the end of 2024.
- 3.3 The governance for the Portsmouth SENDAP strategy sits with the SENDAP Board which meets three times a year and includes representatives from education (including schools and other settings), children's social care and health partners. The Board is co-chaired by Portsmouth Parent Voice (PPV) and the ICB.
- 3.4 Portsmouth is one of the local authorities who are testing out elements of the SEND Improvement Plan which was set out in the previous Government's SEND and Alternative Provision green paper. Portsmouth is leading this work in the South East and is working with West Sussex, East Sussex and Brighton and Hove to do this. This is facilitating some areas of new work, including an early language programme 'ELSEC' and also supporting with areas of evaluation in aspects of work that Portsmouth has had in place for some time, including Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP). The change programme has also supported Portsmouth to pull together available data and information about our children and young people with SEND and this has formed the Local Area Improvement Plan (LAIP) which is set out in [Appendix 1](#).

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- 3.5 Arrangements for SEND and the experience for children and their families in relation to this are subject to inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The inspection is of the local area and therefore scrutinises arrangements and practice of not just the local authority but other stakeholders including health commissioners and providers. Portsmouth was inspected in 2019 under the previous inspection framework. This reported favourably about many areas of Portsmouth's support and practice and did not result in a written statement of action being required, reflective of satisfaction by inspectors of our arrangements at the time. Portsmouth took part in a pilot of the new framework in 2022 which similarly concluded with a lot of positive and useful feedback for the local area. It is likely that Portsmouth will be inspected under the new framework for the first time in the academic year 2024/2025. A self-evaluation framework (SEF) is in draft form at present in anticipation of inspection, along with other aspects of inspection preparation. We are keen to ensure that the positive legacy of work to support SEND is evident when the inspection team visit Portsmouth.
- 3.6 Nationally, it is recognised that the volume of children and young people with identified SEND needs have increased considerably. The increase was evident prior to the pandemic and has continued to increase following this period. Schools and settings, across all age phases, report an increased complexity of need which results in additional resource within settings being put into place to support SEND needs. This has resulted in increased pressure on available funding and resources, particularly with respect to the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant which provides high needs funding to settings.
- 3.7 There are two initiatives led by the Department for Education (DfE) to support LAs who are reporting high levels of deficit caused by the pressures on the HNB:
- **Delivering Better Value (DBV)** has been made available to 55 LAs; and
  - **Safety Valve (SV)**, which is only offered to LAs with the highest level of deficit - this has been taken up by 38 LAs.
- 3.8 Both schemes make some financial assistance available to support the deficit position. The SV scheme requires the LA to sign up to a monitored agreement which sets out how and when the LA will reach a position of balance with respect to HNB. Whilst Portsmouth is forecasting a deficit in its HNB, we are not in as challenging a position as many other LAs. It is not likely that Portsmouth will be required to engage in either scheme. Portsmouth met with the DfE in autumn 2024 to discuss our HNB position and the actions we are taking to mitigate this which include an internal working group and a detailed action plan.

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**4. SEND needs in Portsmouth**

**Summary of SEND need in Portsmouth**

- 4.1 In Portsmouth the proportion of pupils with SEND has continued to grow since the SEND Reforms in 2015. In 2022/23 19.8% of pupils attending Portsmouth schools have either an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or are receiving SEN Support. The national average is 18.4%.
- 4.2 In 2023/24 4.7% of pupils had EHCPs in Portsmouth; nationally this is 4.8%. Historically, Portsmouth has had proportionally more pupils with EHCPs than was seen nationally so this is a positive development in terms of aligning with the national picture.
- 4.3 In 2023/24 15.1% of pupils were recorded as receiving SEN Support in Portsmouth, nationally this is 13.6%.

**Primary Age Phase (5-11)**

- 4.4 In 2022/23 the highest proportion of need type in Portsmouth was speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). This matches the regional picture (32.7% in Portsmouth vs 33% regionally). It is important to consider the prevalence of pupils recorded as having autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) against this figure as this is an area where Portsmouth sees the biggest difference to the national picture with 12.3% categorised as having this as their primary need vs 5.9% regionally.
- 4.5 The second highest proportion of need is Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH), which also matches the regional picture, but is at a slightly higher rate in Portsmouth (19.8% in Portsmouth vs 17.9% regionally).
- 4.6 Other than the differences noted above, the proportions of primary need in primary schools are not notably different in Portsmouth than the picture seen regionally.

**Secondary age phase (11-16)**

- 4.7 Portsmouth's most prevalent primary need in secondary schools is SEMH. This matches the regional picture but at a much greater level (32% in Portsmouth vs 22.8% regionally).
- 4.8 Our second highest need is Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD). However, regionally the second highest need was Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD). Third highest regionally is ASD, but this is 5th highest in Portsmouth with SLCN and SpLD appearing more often.

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**Specialist provision**

- 4.9 Pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder represent the highest proportion of need in our special schools, and this is also reflected regionally (35.2% in Portsmouth vs 32.8% regionally).
- 4.10 Our second highest level of need is Speech, Language and Communication needs whereas regionally it is SLD.
- 4.11 Our SEND forecasting indicates that over the period 2024 to 2029 we expect the number of Portsmouth children of compulsory school age with EHCPs to increase by 42% from 1325 in January 2024 to 1887 in January 2029. We are expecting the total number of children of statutory school age with an EHCP to increase from 1325 in January 2024 to 1887 by January 2029, a 42% increase.
- 4.12 To support the growing number of children with EHCPs in Portsmouth it is forecast that we will need to create approximately 150 additional specialist places in total across special schools and inclusion centres over the next five years. 46 places have already been approved in relation to the Omega Centre scheme details of which are given in paragraph 5.5. Business cases for further schemes will be brought forward to address the remaining places that are required. A breakdown of the need for places is show below:

	Special school places			Inclusion centre places		
	Primary	Secondary	Total	Primary	Secondary	Total
<b>2024/25</b>	285	363	648	122	46	168
<b>2025/26</b>	308	374	682	137	45	182
<b>2026/27</b>	328	388	716	147	46	193
<b>2027/28</b>	331	398	729	150	47	197
<b>2028/29</b>	340	396	736	155	50	205

**5. SEND provision**

- 5.1 Portsmouth children and young people with SEND attend a range of education provisions and settings which include:
- Mainstream schools - early years, primary, secondary and further education
  - Specialist settings or alternative provision (AP)
  - Inclusion Centres - enhanced provision situated within mainstream schools
- 5.2 Portsmouth's specialist school provision encompasses the following settings:
- Mary Rose, Cliffdale and Redwood Park Academies (part of Solent Academies Trust) - all of these schools support children and young people with learning difficulties and social communication needs. Mary Rose supports children and young people with profound and multiple needs,

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which may include complex medical needs. Mary Rose Academy is made up of three campuses: Compass; Lantern; and Craneswater.

- Wymering School (part of Delta Education Trust) - supports children and young people with learning and social communication needs. The school is led by Delta Academy Trust
- The Harbour School (part of Delta Education Trust) - provides both specialist provision for young people from year 5 with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) and AP for young people, including for medical needs which are preventing school attendance. The school also provides for young people who have been permanently excluded from their school. The Harbour School has four campuses: Bay; Vista; Lighthouse; and Bridge.
- Hewitt-Dale Inclusion Centre - provides AP for children aged up to year 5. It also provides for young people who have been permanently excluded from their school. The inclusion centre is part of Flying Bull Academy which is led by the University of Chichester Academy Trust (UniCAT).

- 5.3 On occasion, Portsmouth children and young people attend schools and settings outside of the city. This may reflect parental preference where they reside close to the border of Hampshire or where a provision outside of the city is felt to best be able to support a young person's SEND needs. This may be a maintained specialist setting or an independent setting.
- 5.4 There is additional support available for our schools for children and young people with SEND. Some support requires financial subscription to a service, for example The Harbour School's multi agency behaviour support team (MABSS) with other support available at no cost to all schools and settings, such as the Inclusion Outreach Support team. All schools in Portsmouth have a mental health support team (MHST) as well as access to the neurodiversity team (MDNDT). Schools and early years settings are able to apply for an inclusion capital grant, to provide enhancements to their setting to support learners with SEND.
- 5.5 Plans are currently being finalised to increase specialist capacity further with a new site for the Mary Rose Academy at the Omega Centre, and by establishing a new inclusion centre for primary aged pupils. Depending on the size of these developments, one or two further projects are likely to be needed to ensure that specialist places are available to those pupils whose needs are best met in that setting.
- 5.6 We are also extending the range of opportunities for some secondary age young people with SEND by increasing clarity and transparency in relation to offsite alternative provision. We have created an Alternative Provision Directory. Schools and local authority commissioning teams (such as the SEND Team and

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the Virtual School) can use this resource to identify suitable, PCC quality assured provision, for students with SEND.

- 5.7 By providing support to mainstream settings and creating sufficient specialist capacity in the City we aim to keep our use of out of City independent provision at current low levels. Over the forecast period we are expecting the number in independent provision to increase very slightly from 18 to 22 pupils.

**6. Education Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) and Plans (EHCPs) in Portsmouth**

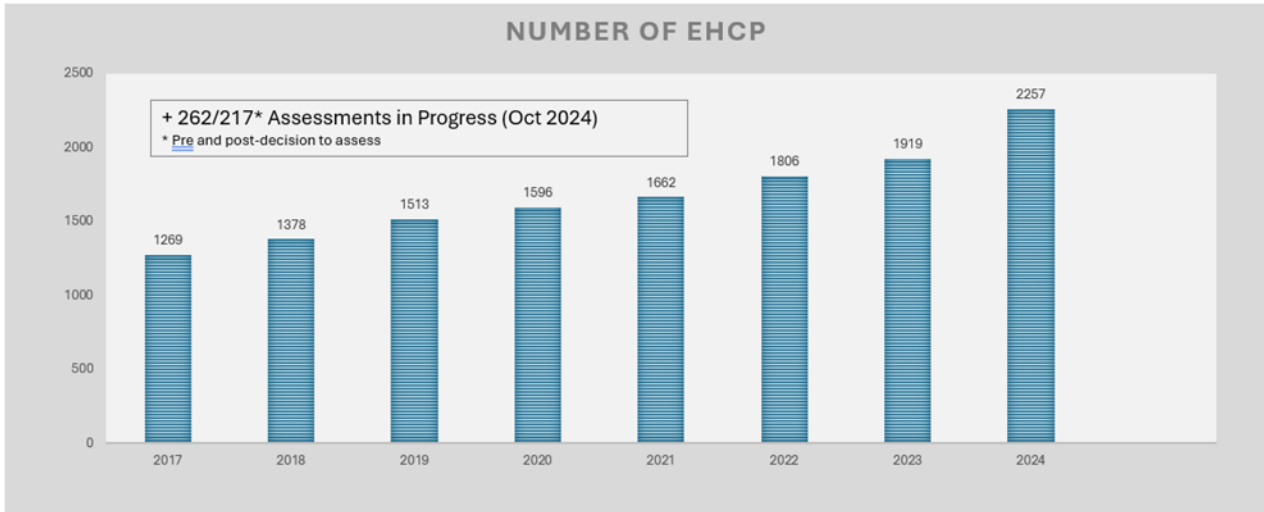
**Background to the rise in EHCNAs and EHCPs**

- 6.1 The number of children and young people with EHCPs in England has increased by 11.4% between January 2023 and January 2024. The number of EHCPs has increased nationally each year since their introduction in 2014.
- 6.2 The number of initial requests for an EHCNA in the calendar year nationally has also continued to increase Apart from a decrease in 2020, an atypical year when the pandemic was disrupting both education and local authority services, initial requests have increased each year since EHCPs were introduced.
- 6.3 The national picture has been reflected in Portsmouth with both the rate of requests for assessments and the overall number of EHCPs maintained within the city increasing annually.
- 6.4 The increased volume has led to a significant pressure within our Educational Psychology Service (EPS). An EP assessment is required for all EHCNAs and alongside this, there is an acknowledgement that this is a hard to recruit to professional group.
- 6.5 Challenges with capacity in our EPS and within our SEND service, who process, write and maintain EHCPs has impacted upon our ability to complete EHCNAs within the 20-week statutory timeframe.

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6.6 The table below shows the number of EHCPs in Portsmouth since 2015:



This illustrates a percentage increase of 77% between 2017 and June 2024 (SEN2 figures for January 2024 were 2,000).

- 6.7 This has resulted in significant service pressure to complete statutory assessments of SEND within the 20 weeks laid out in statute for this process to be undertaken. It has also resulted in challenges in undertaking key elements of review for existing EHCPs, including attendance and input to the annual review process and a timely response to amendments or changes to EHCPs which are required following these meetings. The increase in this area has put financial pressure on the Council leading to a projected overspend on the High Needs Budget (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2024/2025.
- 6.8 Requests for EHCNAs can be made by parent/carers, schools and settings and other professionals. The consideration which needs to be made when a request is considered is set out in law (section 36(8) of the Children and Families Act 2014). It is essentially a two-part test:
- Whether the child or young person has or may have special educational needs; and
  - Whether they may need special educational provision to be made through an EHC plan.
- 6.9 If the answer to both of these questions is yes, then the LA must carry out an EHCNA. Whilst the Code of Practice details what support it would expect to have been put into place by a school or setting and reviewed before a request for an EHCP is made, a request cannot be refused if this has not been undertaken. The legal threshold for assessment is considered to be low; if the supporting information is not clear or indicates that the young person has not



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made good educational progress then that can be indicative of SEN and therefore an assessment should be initiated.

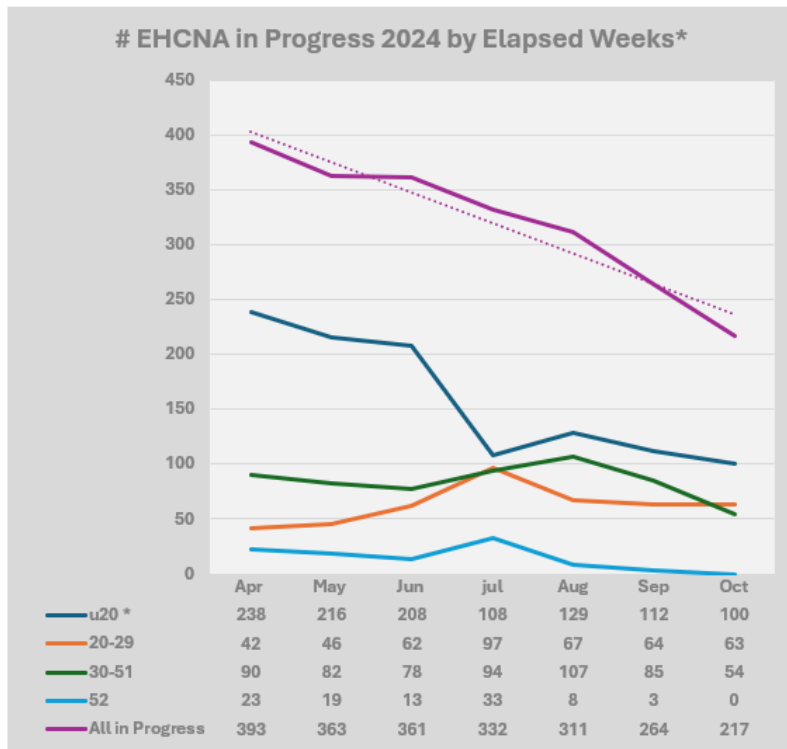
**Summary of the work that is being done to clear the backlog of EHCNAs and improve timeliness**

6.10 Portsmouth is utilising agency support to increase the amount of Educational Psychology resource available to support the EHCNA process. Agency support to assist with writing EHCPs is also in place.

6.11 Short term support from a project manager was made available to maintain the project plan and recovery plan for this area of work.

6.12 In addition, Portsmouth receives support from a consultant from the Department for Education (DfE) who meets with officers on a monthly basis to discuss data in relation to the rate of request for an EHCNA and compliance with the 20-week timeframe.

6.13 Work associated with recovery plan has led to a reduction in the 'backlog' of EHC needs assessments in Portsmouth which is shown in the graph below:



6.14 In addition to reducing the overall number of assessments underway in Portsmouth, the number which have been completed within the 20-week

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statutory timeframe has also increased. In October 2024 this was 6% of assessments. The year-to-date average for timeliness is currently 3%. Whilst this represents an increase on the timeliness reported for Portsmouth in the annual Department for Education census (SEN2) for 2023, there is a significant amount of recovery work underway to continue to increase the timeliness of EHC needs assessments in Portsmouth, with a forecast for this to reach 20% timeliness in Spring 2025 and further increase once the 'backlog' is fully addressed.

6.15 If Portsmouth was to attain an annual average of 20% of assessments completed within 20 weeks then, based on the 2023 data return, Portsmouth would be placed 127th out of 150 LAs and 14th out the 19 regional LAs. Our expectation would be that there would be further improvements the following year and an associated improvement in LA ranking.

6.16 A SEND Performance and Outcomes Board (POB) has been established which meets monthly and enables scrutiny and challenge of SEND performance data. The frequency of these conversations also allows for ongoing consideration of resource requirements to continue to facilitate improvements in this area.

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Signed by (Director)

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 Portsmouth Local Area Improvement Plan (LAIP)

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Portsmouth Local Area Improvement Plan (collated as part of the SEND and Alternative Provision change programme)	
<a href="https://www.portsmoutheducationpartnership.co.uk/alternative-provision-directory/">https://www.portsmoutheducationpartnership.co.uk/alternative-provision-directory/</a>	