

Report of Maxine Squire, Assistant Director, Education and Skills

Update on the York Inclusion and Belonging Special Educational Needs and Alternative Provision strategy 2025-2030.

Summary

1. The current York Special Educational Needs (SEND) Strategy is due to conclude in 2025. A draft version of the new 'Inclusion and Belonging' Special Educational Needs and Alternative Provision strategy 2025 - 2030 has been developed as a refreshed and ambitious plan aimed at improving the lived experiences of children, young people, and their families across York.
2. Families have told us that we need to think broadly around inclusion and belonging and that all children and young people need to be covered in this plan, with a focus on those children and young people who are too anxious to go to school, for children who are not in school, who are educated at home, who are in alternative provision, or at risk of exclusion.
3. The aim of today's report is to:
 - Bring an early draft version of the draft Inclusion and Belonging Special Educational Needs and Alternative Provision Strategy (SENDAP) 2025 -2030 to Scrutiny and members for initial discussion and comment. This will form part of the wider partnership of co-production. The aim is for the strategy to be published following Executive Board in October 2025.
4. The strategy focuses on making sure our children and young people feel that they are valued and visible, around early identification and intervention, providing the right support at the right time, and ensuring

children and young people are well-prepared for adulthood. The plan also addresses the need for a confident and skilled workforce and improved mental health support for children and young people.

5. This strategy is aligned with the Autism and ADHD Strategy 2025–2030, with the actions outlined in the Inclusion and Belonging SENDAP Strategy designed to support and complement its key priorities.
6. It is therefore focussing on improving children and young people's health needs, their well-being, their access to good high-quality services and constitutes an important part of our ambition to make York a 'health-generating city' and to fulfil the aims of our Health and Well-being Strategy around reducing inequalities.

Background

7. More than ten years on from the implementation of the Children and Families Act, 2014, there is a national Special Educational Needs and Disability crisis.
8. Despite substantial investment in the SEND system, many families, children, and young people as well as schools, local authorities, and health partners feel deeply frustrated and let down. Services remain fragmented and inconsistent, with widespread delays, poor coordination, and a lack of accountability, leaving too many children without the support they urgently need.
9. The Yorkshire and Humber regional summary of the most recent 15 SEND and CQC inspections highlighted common challenges across local areas, particularly in relation to long waiting times for Autism and ADHD diagnoses. A significant gap was identified in the support available for children and young people who are neurodivergent during the pre-diagnosis period. Additionally, concerns were raised about the quality and timeliness of Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plans, transition processes and experiences, preparation for adulthood, and both the availability and effective use of Alternative Provision.
10. The Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Needs Assessment (2024) sets out the key information to inform this strategy. It was created with support from professionals

working in education, health, and social care in York. The views of parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, as well as staff who work with these families are also included.

11. Further headline data includes information from The Autism and ADHD Health Needs Assessment (May 2024) tells us that compared to 2021, the children and young people's autism service has seen a 50% rise in monthly referrals, and just over a quarter of children and young people have been on the waiting list for more than a year.
12. Additionally, York has experienced a significant increase in the number of children requiring support through an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plan, rising from 1,317 in June 2024 to 1,693. Concurrently, requests for support to the Learning Support Hub, which provides outreach services to educational settings, continues to grow. Families continue to report challenges navigating the system, feeling they must advocate persistently to secure appropriate support.
13. There is continuing financial pressure to the local authority generated by the costs of EHCPs and out of city placements.
14. York has key strengths to build upon in shaping its strategic plan for improvement, and this work is ongoing. The partnership is committed to building on the ambitious work of the York Schools and Academies Board (YSAB), supporting the city's efforts to enhance consistency in inclusive practice across schools and educational settings.
15. These strengths include joint working and participation, the graduated approach offer, KS4 outcomes and progress. Extensive work has been carried out by the new attendance team structure and multi-agency action group. Attendance Leads meetings demonstrate this positive impact on attendance and although suspensions rates are above national average the data shows reductions across primary and secondary sectors. Permanent exclusions are below national.
16. The first phase of the five-year strategy will prioritise establishing greater consistency in inclusive practice across settings, workforce development, enhancing the York Local Offer, and improving transparent communication and access to information for families. A key focus will also be on strengthening support for children and young

people awaiting neurodevelopmental diagnoses. The implementation of the SEND Hub in York will represent a significant milestone in delivering these priorities.

17. This strategy has been designed with flexibility to accommodate anticipated national reforms from Autumn 2025. It will also align with changes brought about by the Children and Wellbeing Bill to support safeguarding and raise educational standards. It is underpinned by the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan (March 2023) and places a strong emphasis on supporting children and young people within their local mainstream schools. An accompanying action plan will drive implementation, with oversight and governance provided by the SEND Partnership Board
18. All partners have a role to play in building a more inclusive society and in providing services in a high-quality manner which serve neurodivergent individuals well. Health services and council services have a duty in statutory guidance to plan services, develop partnerships and commission together in response to need. This strategy supports this work.

Consultation

19. The phases of consultation are set out below:
20. The initial phase focused on ensuring alignment with key strategic priorities across York. This strategy is closely aligned with the Autism and ADHD Strategy and has been shaped by feedback gathered throughout the development process. It also shares several key priorities with the draft York Health & Care Partnership Children and Young People's Plan.
 - One city for all (2023-2027)
 - Draft Autism and ADHD strategy
 - York Health & Care Partnership Children and Young People's Plan
 - Health and wellbeing Strategy
 - Children and Young people's plan
 - Young People Belong in York
 - Existing SEND Strategy York (expires 2025)

- Children and Young Peoples Mental Health Strategic Transformation Plan 2025 – 2030
- Serious Violence Response Strategy
- Early Help
- Contextual Safeguarding
- Preparation for adulthood
- Neglect

21. From Autumn 2024 to June 2025 the following consultation activities have taken place:

- The Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Needs Assessment (2024)
- Parent/carer forum listening events - Autumn term 2024-Spring term 2025.
- Parent/carer workshop – June 2025
- DFE /York Mainstream Inclusion Review - June 2025
- Feedback from Autism and ADHD strategy, Scrutiny - May 2025
- York Primary SENCO forum - June 2025
- City of York Safeguarding Partnership Board - June 2025
- Multi Agency Strategy task and finish groups Spring and Summer term – April and June 2025
- Parent/Carer and practitioner Surveys - May 2025 (approx. 320 parents)
- Parent/Carer forum strategy activity workshop event - June 2025 (20 parents)
- National Development Team for Inclusion partnership training event two events - March 2025
- Publication of the [Core Connectors report](#) which has provided valuable insights into young people's experiences of health and social care in York
- Publication of the [Listening to Neurodivergent Families](#) in partnership with the Land, York Carers Centre, York Disability Rights Forum and Parent Carer Forum York in January 2025.
- Executive group briefing feedback – June 2025
- Executive summary consultation 7th July
- Young person consultation – July 2025

Council Plan

22. This strategy aligns with the Council Plan 2023–2027 and its vision of creating a city for all. It contributes to the plan's four priority areas:
- **Equality and Human Rights** – by focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable groups and promoting inclusive education.
 - **Affordability** – through initiatives such as poverty-proofing schools and providing families with information and support to help manage the cost-of-living crisis.
 - **Environment and Climate** – by promoting the development of local Enhanced Resource Provisions within mainstream schools, reducing the need for out-of-area placements, and supporting sustainability.
 - **Health and Wellbeing** – by prioritising improved outcomes for children and young people, ensuring they receive the right support at the right time to thrive.

Implications

Financial - There are no direct financial implications of this report, which is for members to discuss and feed into a city-wide strategy. Individual organisations are responsible for resourcing the commitments in the strategy, and for City of York Council all commitments will be delivered within existing budgeted resources.

Human Resources (HR) -There are no HR implications of this report.

Equalities - Children and young people with special educational needs and disability will also have support through the Equality Act 2010'. There are therefore equalities implications of this strategy, which aims to include all children and young people with SEND better within society and services and will have a positive impact on inequalities.

Legal There are no legal implications of this report.

Crime and Disorder - The aims of this strategy also do support the work of the serious violence strategy, focusing on supporting children who are not attending school and key groups more vulnerable to offending now and in the future.

Information Technology (IT) There are no implications for IT as part of this report.

Property There are not implications for property.

Risk Management

23. There are no known risks relating to this report.

Recommendations

24. Members are asked to:

- 1) Note and discuss the early draft of the Inclusion and Belonging, Special Educational Needs and Alternative Provision Strategy 2025-2030.

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**Report
Approved**



Date 26 June
2025

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

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For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes

Annex A – Draft Inclusion and Belonging SENDAP Strategy 2025 – 2030

Background Papers

Children & Young People with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities: A Health Needs Assessment 2024 (July 2024)

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s178054/Annex%20A%20-%20Special%20Educational%20Needs%20Assessment%202024.pdf>

A city that works for all: Autism and ADHD Strategy for York
2025-2030 – Draft (May 2025)

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s183211/Annex%20B%20-%20A%20city%20that%20works%20for%20all%20Autism%20and%20ADHD%20Strategy%20for%20York%20Draft%20May%202025.pdf>

Healthwatch York, Young People’s Experiences of Health and Social Care:
Core Connectors Report 2025

<https://www.healthwatchyork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Core-Connector-report-March-2025.pdf>

Healthwatch York, Listening to Neurodivergent Families in York (January
2025)

<https://www.healthwatchyork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Listening-to-Neurodivergent-Families-in-York-January-2025.pdf>

Abbreviations

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disability

AP – Alternative Provision

EHC Plans – Education and Health Care Plans

NDTI – National Development Team for Inclusion

YSAB – York’s Schools and Academies Board