

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 1 May 2025 at 6.00 pm in Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG

Present: Councillors A R H England (Vice-Chair), C Chikandamina, P Davis, A S Jhawar, L Parker, K Tonks and J Urey

Also Present: Councillor S A W Reynolds (Cabinet Member: Children, Young People, Education, Employment & Skills)

In Attendance: L Goodfellow (Interim Service Delivery Manager SEND and Personalisation), P Starkey (Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)), D Thomas-White (Lead Lawyer: Children and Adults) and S Wellman (Director: Education & Skills)

Apologies: Councillors J Jones and S P Burrell
Co-Optees: S Fikeis and C Morgan

CYP47 Declarations of Interest

None.

CYP48 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2025 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CYP49 SEND

The Interim Service Delivery Manager: SEND and Personalisation presented an update to the Committee on the current landscape for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) within Telford and Wrekin highlighting key statistics, recent developments and strategic initiatives aimed at supporting children and young people with SEND.

The presentation outlined Telford and Wrekin's local offer for children and young people identified as having SEND or complex needs as one which was both comprehensive and inclusive, reflecting a strong commitment to co-production and early intervention. The local offer had been underpinned by strong relationships with parents and carers, with all schools signed up to a co-produced Working Together Charter developed with PODS Parent Carer Forum.

At the time of the meeting, the size of the school population in Telford and Wrekin was estimated at 31,527 pupils with 5,360 children identified with

SEND, representing 17.9% of the child population, higher than the national average of 16.3%. Of these, 2,458 children and young people aged 0-25 had Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) which accounted for 4.1% of the population when compared to the national average of 4.8%. The number of EHCPs had increased over the past few years and was demonstrated by a 11.6% increase between 2023 and 2024.

The presentation highlighted a number of key strengths including the Council's EHCP process. During 2024/25 the Council's SEND Team had delivered over 90% of Education, Health and Care Plans within the 20-week statutory timeframe when compared to the national average of 50.7% within the same period.

The Inclusive Schools Forum (ISF), was now in its seventh year and had supported 1,080 children by providing targeted resources without the need for an EHCP and had been recognised nationally as a model of good practice. As a school-led initiative, the ISF had provided support and challenges to mainstream schools regarding their practices and provisions for children with SEND. Members heard that the Forum had continued to foster an inclusive educational framework within Telford and Wrekin, enabling children with increasingly complex needs to thrive and succeed in mainstream educational settings.

Nationally there had been an increase in the number of children being identified with complex special educational needs and approximately 1.4m children had been identified in 2020, with numbers continuing to rise and expected to reach around 1.7m. The Council's SEND services included a wide range of professional support teams, such as educational psychologists, early years advisors and the Portage service, a home-visiting educational service designed for pre-school children with SEND.

The development of specialist outreach services from schools such as Southall and Haughton ensured mainstream settings were equipped to meet the increasing complexity in special educational needs. Specialist teachers had been provided with bespoke advice and training opportunities for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), teachers and teaching assistants within mainstream schools.

The Council had also established specialist hubs which had enabled children to be taught within a reduced class size with a specialist teacher but still have access to the mainstream school environment. At the time of the meeting, four hubs were currently operational supporting a total of 29 children with an additional hub due to open in September 2025. Investments had also been made into the delivery of resource bases within mainstream schools, which offered smaller classrooms run by schools with support from outreach services.

Members heard that Telford and Wrekin was the lead local authority in the West Midlands for the Department for Education's SEND & Alternative Provision Change Programme. The programme involved working alongside

Shropshire, Herefordshire, and Worcestershire to test areas of support, share best practices and learning from other regional areas nationally. This collaborative approach would help ensure that the provision for children with SEND is continuously improved and that schools are equipped with the necessary resources and knowledge to support pupils effectively.

There had been many successful initiatives to support children and young people in the Borough including the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme, a pioneering initiative aimed at supporting children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) within Early Years and Primary School settings. Since its launch in September 2024, ELSEC has engaged with 8 primary schools and 6 private nursery settings in Telford and Wrekin, focusing on improving the speech and language support for children in Year 1, Reception and pre-school years.

Building on the success of the National Autism in Schools project, the Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) project was a new initiative which had recently been rolled out across schools in Telford and Wrekin. The project was a nationally funded initiative aimed at enhancing the support for neurodiverse children within mainstream primary schools. At the time of the meeting, 20 mainstream primary schools were participating in the PINS project with a further 10 schools signed up to begin this project in the next school term.

In response to questions raised during the meeting around the EHCP process and Hub provision, the Interim Service Delivery Manager: SEND and Personalisation advised that the Council had a very strong and well-established process in Telford for dealing with EHCP requests which had been supported by a consistent and experienced team. Staff retention had been key to maintaining continuity and every child who had come through the service with a request was allocated to both a coordinator and a SEND officer, who had stayed with the case throughout and maintained close links with the school.

The Interim Service Delivery Manager: SEND and Personalisation confirmed that the PINS project had been working well and was due to be rolled out again during the next academic year with a further group of schools invited to take part.

The Director: Education & Skills advised that a secondary hub was in place at Langley School in partnership with Southall School and had provided a flexible model where children could spend as much time as possible in a mainstream setting but also have access to the specialist unit when needed. This type of provision had supported staff to better understand the curriculum and tailor support for pupils accordingly.

The Director: Education & Skills also stated that the Council had continued to recognise national challenges around autism diagnosis and long waiting times and was continuing to work closely with health partners. Members were informed that a "Waiting Well" initiative had been developed, alongside the

commissioning of an Autism Hub for children and young people which would provide a range of support services for families whilst they wait for a formal diagnosis. A recommissioning process was also underway, informed by a comprehensive review of current services and challenges across the Council. In response to questions raised around early years inclusion and support for children diagnosed with SEND, the Interim Service Delivery Manager: SEND and Personalisation commented that all early years settings, including childminders were expected to support children regardless of need. The Early Years Team was available to provide guidance and support and advisors were highly skilled and if additional help was needed, the Early Years Inclusion Fund would be able to provide resources or equipment to meet individual needs.

The Interim Service Delivery Manager: SEND and Personalisation confirmed that the ELSEC programme was one of several interventions and schools were encouraged to assess each child's needs and consult with Learning Support Advisory Teachers as needed. If the ELSEC programme was not able to provide support, alternatives such as Talk Boost could be used. SENCOs were also trained to guide families and staff to the right service and internal screening could also be used to help determine the best intervention.

The Director: Education & Skills advised that parents should first speak with the school's SEND Coordinator regarding any concerns around support at school which could be further escalated with the Council as required.

In response to questions raised around the number of hubs and resource bases in the Borough, the Interim Service Delivery Manager: SEND and Personalisation confirmed that at the time of the meeting, there were specialist hubs located at Haughton Primary School for both KS1 and KS2 pupils and also at Old Park Primary School for KS1 pupils. Resource bases were available at Newport Infant and Junior Schools as well as John Fletcher of Madeley Primary School and a new base was expected to open at Millbrook Primary School. Satellite hubs were also in operation at Wrockwardine Wood in partnership the Bridge School and at The Telford Langley School in partnership with Southall School.

The Director: Education & Skills commented that SEND assessments take into consideration home life in addition to school environment and health implications in order to help identify the root cause of a child's needs and ensure the most appropriate support is put in place.

Members thanked Officers for the detailed report and presentation and requested that site visit to a specialist hub be arranged for the Committee.

CYP50 Work Programme

The Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny) presented the updated work programme to the Committee. Members were advised that there were no further meetings scheduled to take place for the 2024/25 municipal year and

any remaining items on the work programme would be carried forward into the next year.

CYP51 Chair's Update

None.

The meeting ended at 6.50 pm

Chairman: _____

Date: Thursday 10 July 2025