

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	08 October 2025
Title of Report:	SEND Local Area Improvement Plan
Lead Member:	Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Lisa McDonald (Head of SEND)
Contact Email:	Lisa.mcdonald@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	LMcD
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This report provides two key updates on the theme of special educational needs:

- an update on the progress of the plan to improve the quality, timeliness and outcomes of our Education Health and Care Plan Trajectories
- an update on the SEND capital programme to increase provision and support across the local area

Recommendations and Reasons

It is recommended that the progress, key challenges and priorities for the next quarter are noted.

Alternative options considered and rejected

No alternative recommendations, this is a scrutiny paper with no formal decisions being taken.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Ensuring that the children and young people with SEND and their families receive the earliest support with the right help, at the right time.

- Making Plymouth a great place to grow up and grow old
- Keeping children, adults and communities safe
- Providing quality public services
- Focusing on prevention and early intervention

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

The Special Educational Needs spend on independent placements for children and young people with SEND create significant financial pressures on the Local Authority Designated Schools Grant.

Financial Risks

The Special Educational Needs spend on independent placements for children and young people with SEND create significant financial pressures on the Local Authority Designated Schools Grant.

Legal Implications

There are no specific legal considerations related to this update. The Council must adhere to the relevant legislation such as the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Special Education Needs and Disability Regulations 2014. Improvements to the timeliness and quality of assessments and annual reviews will contribute to the Council fulfilling its statutory duties.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

Increased travel across the City and out of area due to capacity of specialist placements.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

None.

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							
C	Climate Impact Assessment (if applicable)							

Background papers:

**Add rows as required to box below*

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	N/A	Leg	N/A	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
<p>Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Lisa McDonald (Head of SEND)</p> <p>Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes</p> <p>Date agreed: 06/10/2025</p>											
<p>Cabinet Member approval: Approved via email</p> <p>Date approved: 01/10/2025</p>											

Introduction

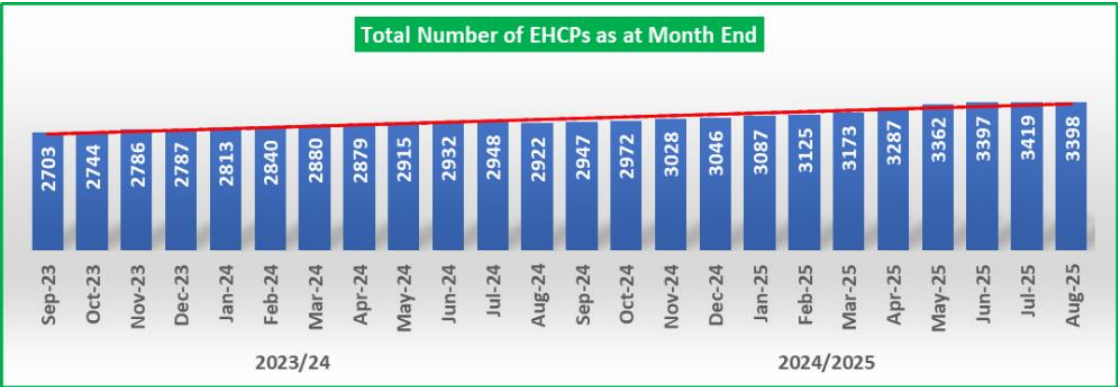
This report provides two key updates on the theme of special educational needs:

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Statutory Education, Health and Care Plan Update

At the end of August 2025, 3404, children and young people (CYP) in Plymouth have an EHCP, compared to 3419 in July 2025. This includes the increase for completed new plans, transitions in and out of the local area and the ceasing of any appropriate post-18 plans.

Chart 1 - Total number of EHCPs

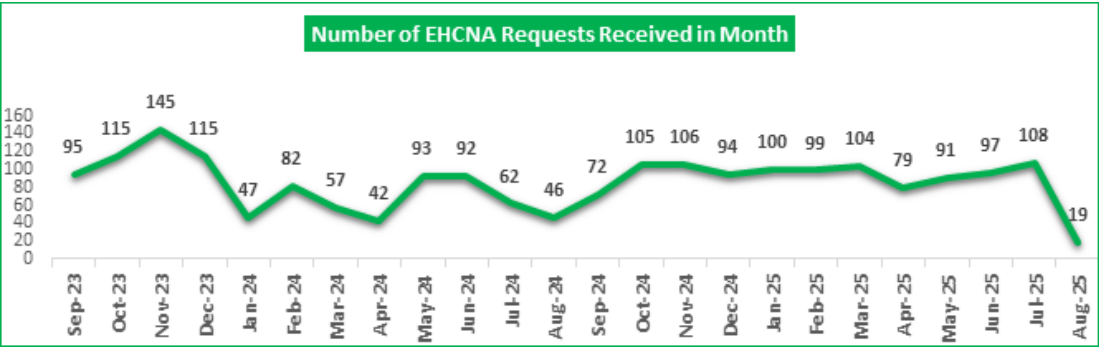


Requests for assessment levels are continuing to fluctuate across the year with variation in the number of requests for assessment. There were 19 requests for assessments in August 2025, compared to 80 requests for assessments in July 2025. As expected, this is a significant decrease than in July 2025 due to the school holiday period.

For the annual year to date (2024/25) there have been 1072 requests for assessment, an average of 89 per month.

It is expected that with the start of the new targeted funding schools in September, we will start to see a decline in requests as schools will have the ability to apply for funding to enable provision and support without the requirement of an EHCP.

Chart 2 - Number of requests for EHC needs assessments received in month



There were 123 requests due a decision by the end of August. The service made 84 decisions within the month, demonstrating that decision making is ahead of time, as many decisions had been taken early in July.

Performance for August 2025 is that 100% of decisions were taken in time. The team continue to improve the quality assurance and communication with families.

Of those due a decision, 65.6% of requests were agreed to assess. 34.5% of requests were refused, where needs could be met within mainstream through the graduated approach and without a statutory plan.

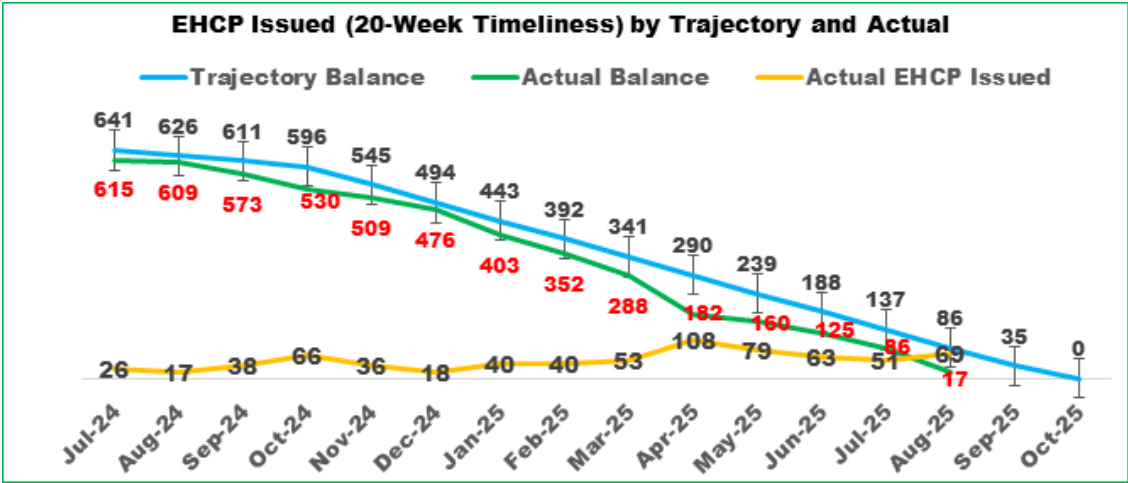
As of the end of August, there are 263 young people on the waiting list to be allocated for an Educational Psychologist (EP) assessment following the latest decision panel. The shortage of psychologists does impact the 20 weeks trajectory however the team are mitigating this risk by prioritisation of allocation, the development of a long-term assistant EP role and through a business case to increase agency support.

This academic year 661 plans have been finalised since September 2024. This is in line with the current trajectory and as promised, the team have now reduced the backlog of plans that were waiting in the system in June 2024.

69 final EHCPs were issued in August having received all amendments from settings and families. This represents an increase compared to an average of 40 plans per month being issued for this academic year, and only 16 plans per month on average in June 2024. 10.1% plans were issued within the 20-week timescale in August, and 17% in July, demonstrating that now the backlog is cleared, the pace towards the statutory timescales is climbing as predicted at the start of the journey.

The chart below demonstrates the current projected timescale compared to the actual performance of the team.

Chart 4 – Tracking of issued plans



Communication with Families and professionals

The duty system that was implemented from the 5th May 2025 continues to improve communication with both families and professionals. The duty system comprises of a Caseworker, two EHCP Officers and two Annual Reviewing Officers each day. The team are responsible for managing telephone calls to the help line, answering queries that are received in general inboxes alongside conducting normal duties connected to individual children. Data captured through the Avaya system demonstrates that families were previously waiting to have their calls answered with many abandoning their calls. Since introducing the duty system the experience for families has been significantly improved.

The chart below details the telephone performance information both pre and post the duty system.

Month	Calls Answered	Calls Abandoned	% Answered	Average call time	Average time to abandon call
February	251	126	50%	9.27min	10.40min
March	351	160	54%	9.37min	9.35min
April	198	31	86%	8.22 min	7.32 min
May (Duty started)	269	21	93%	6.42min	3.26 min
June	312	13	96%	6.58min	2.22min
July	285	5	98%	7.04 min	2.24min
August	111	2	98.5%	5.57min	1.02min

Quality Assurance

Integrated quality assurance continues across each panel, including funding approvals and decisions to issue plan. Amended EHCP plans following annual reviews are now fully quality assured with officers given individual feedback to inform learning and improve practice.

Quality assurance through the Decision to Issue Panel is now well understood within the service. Feedback is being actioned on individual plans and officers are being encouraged to shadow the Decision to Issue panel to further understand the process and the expectations on the service.

The quality assurance report provided to the Board in June has now been turned into a wider action plan and is being presented regularly to the Local Areas SEND Improvement Board.

A launch session for Invision 360 software took place in August and will provide further capacity for the team to review plans, track progress and create learning reports to support improvements. Access to the system is now live and being used by managers.

The team continue to focus on the quality of decision making, outputs and outcomes achieved. This is involving new learning, with high support and challenge to sustain progress. To support consistency and standards The SEND team have co-produced standard operating procedures for each aspect of the SEND work. The standards are to ensure that we have high quality guidance for officers, in time this can lead to better performance management, support and challenge against agreed criteria.

Capital SEND Sufficiency Project Update

Background

Plymouth has received a total of £18m in SEND Capital funding since 2018/19 and has committed over £1m to projects. Pipeline projects are projected to lead to an additional spend of circa £3m in 2025/26 bringing our total spend to £4m.

The Plymouth SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2024 – 2030 outlined a strategic framework to meet the growing and evolving needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) across the city, to inform best practice across our services and to focus capital spend on areas of highest need.

The capital programme is therefore underpinned by emphasis on early identification and prevention, mainstream inclusion wherever possible, and expansion of specialist provision to meet needs, drive down costs on home to school transport and reduce reliance in independent specialist schools.

The timeline laid out in the strategy is a multi-year delivery plan with short-, medium-, and long-term milestones through to 2030. This paper outlines the delivery against the strategy to date and the future plans.

Key Developments

Since publication of the SEND Strategy, we have renewed and implemented our Graduated Approach to ensure consistent, high-quality support for children and young people with SEND across all levels, from universal provision to targeted and specialist interventions. This strategic enhancement aims to prevent crisis escalation and ensure timely, appropriate support.

We have refreshed our digital platform, www.plymouthgati.co.uk, to centralise resources and guidance to enhance universal provision.

We have co-produced with families and professionals, the Ordinarily Available Provision framework. It sets clear expectations for early years settings and schools, ensuring inclusive practice is embedded from the start.

We have also created targeted support enhancements, funded through the DSG. A strengthened specialist outreach offer is now available free to all schools, supporting individuals, small groups, and whole-school development for inclusion.

Our Targeted Support Funding has been introduced for learners without EHCPs, enabling access to alternative curriculum pathways.

Thirty internal provisions (within our schools) are now live across primary and secondary schools, supporting 300 young people. Early monitoring shows improvements in engagement, attendance, and behaviour and family feedback indicates increased confidence in the offer, with some families choosing not to pursue EHCPs due to satisfaction with current support.

For our post 16 learners we have created vocational pathways with 50 dual-registered places developed at KS4 in partnership with City College Plymouth, offering vocational packages that support preparation for adulthood.

These actions have supported the foundations of improved inclusion in the city and enhancing earliest support, a fundamental element of the strategy.

Capital Projects and Planning

In February 2025, a SEND Delivery Board was stood up, chaired by the Service Director for Economic Development and vice-chaired by the Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills, to oversee the delivery of capital projects, to enable best use of the capital funding available to support SEND.

In total we have delivered 58 additional places (phase 1) to date, against the five-year plan and we have three further projects in progress for an additional 90 places (phase 2).

Each place available is a potential cost avoidance of, on average, £33,000 per academic year (Total £1.9m). This figure is based on the average cost of independent specialist provision, within a broad range of cost dependent on need, compared to the cost of independent specialist provision.

The remaining £14m of capital is planned to deliver the following phased high-level plan (Phase 1 is delivered.)

Phase	Academic Year	Actions	Number of potential places
2	25/26	<p>By Sept 26: Deliver expansion projects already in train</p> <p>Oct – Nov: Feasibility of site and decision to progress rebuild of special school, rom mandate*</p> <p>Nov – Feb '26: Establish quick win projects in mainstream settings to provide resource provision, prioritise SEMH needs and programme in to schedule</p> <p>Oct – Jan: Seek further options for satellite provision for existing specialist provision, to include wider capital assets of Plymouth City Council</p>	<p>48</p> <p>50</p> <p>50 - 100</p> <p>100 +</p>

		Oct – Dec: Establish and enhance task force to focus on SEND delivery, alongside DFE regions group for primary provision	
3	26/27	Plan use of current special satellite Deliver projects in order of need / availability	38 - 50
	27/28	Deliver new special school*	
	28/29	Deliver projects in order of need / availability	

*This project will exceed the capital funds available and will require additional investment.

Enablers of the sufficiency strategy are national reforms that will place considerable emphasis on inclusion in mainstream settings, as well as regional focus on the potential in our existing school estates through declining pupil numbers, particularly in the primary phase. The capital grants we have received go some way to realising the needs and ambitions of our SEND strategy. As well as using the grants for smaller expansion projects or conversion of existing space, we also need to renew some of our existing specialist provision. As such, we continue to seek further capital support, particularly for children with higher levels of need.

Conclusion

The ambition of the local authority to continuously improve the local area's provision for SEND is well-evidenced, with particular progress on identification of needs and processing against statutory timescales. Our children also require appropriate learning environments where their needs can be met. Our strategy set out to create more specialist places in the city and we have achieved some of this ambition within the first year, with more to establish and achieve over the next four.