

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

07 January 2025



Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillor Heena Makwana (Chair), Councillor Becky Haggar OBE, Councillor Peter Smallwood OBE, Councillor Kishan Bhatt, Councillor Tony Gill, Councillor Rita Judge, and Councillor Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>Co-Opted Member Present: Tony Little</p> <p>Officers Present: Debbie Scarborough (Service Manager, Learn Hillingdon Adult Community Education), Andy Goodwin (Head of Strategic Finance & Deputy S151 Officer), Richard Ennis (Corporate Director of Finance), Abi Preston (Director of Education & SEND), Dominika Michalik (Assistant Director of SEND & Inclusion), Ryan Dell (Democratic Services Officer)</p> <p>Also present: Dylan McTaggart (HRUC Group Principal & Deputy CEO)</p>
43.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
44.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
45.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>Members thanked the clerk for the minutes.</p> <p>Members requested an update on transporter buses (Youth Offer item), the 0-19 service directory, and the third family hub (Children's Centres Delivery Model and Early Years Nurseries Item).</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed</p>
46.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED AS PART II WILL BE</p>

CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (*Agenda Item 4*)

47. **LEARN HILLINGDON SELF-ASSESSMENT REVIEW** (*Agenda Item 5*)

Members considered the Learn Hillingdon self-assessment review. The Chair asked that the report be taken as read and moved to Member questions.

Members commended the report.

Members asked about the role and impact of the new advisory board, its composition, strategic objectives, and safeguarding measures for learners. Officers advised that the advisory board was in its infancy with three meetings planned per year. The board included representatives from various sectors including the Council (including the Director for Education & SEND and the Head of Lifelong Education), learners, staff, community partners and the Safer Hillingdon Partnership. There were still some vacancies to be filled such as a representative from the Citizens Advice Bureau and an employer representative. The first meeting was about introducing the service to the representatives. The second was about quality monitoring and driving standards forward. The third focused on an imminent Ofsted inspection. The board's agenda included financial status, target achievements, and quality monitoring. The board was still developing but was expected to strengthen as members become more involved. Safeguarding measures were robust, with five designated safeguarding officers and a Staying Safe Board of nine members. The board reviewed each disclosure, staff concerns, emotional health and well-being of learners, and ensured that DBSs were in place.

The service had a representative on the Prevent Partnership Board and the Adult Safeguarding Board for the borough.

Members asked about the number of women on the programmes, their roles, and strategies for long-term career progression. Officers advised that approximately 77% of learners were women, primarily caregivers from disadvantaged backgrounds. The majority of learners were working at entry level and pre-entry. This would be equated to primary school level of English and maths. The programmes aimed to build confidence and skills over time, with vocational courses designed to lead to employment. A lot of learners were motivated more by wanting to be able to help their children at school or improving their prospects. Confidence building was also an important factor. Detailed data could be provided later.

Members asked about areas of oversubscription and undersubscription, and how future accommodations would be managed. Officers advised that ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) was the most oversubscribed area due to high demand and a shortage of experienced tutors, both of which were true across London. Officers noted that it was difficult to recall when they were last fully staffed. There was also limited building capacity. Online courses were not a viable solution for many learners due to lack of skills and confidence. Since COVID there were more organisations offering their own provision. Leisure courses such as yoga were undersubscribed, which aligned with current funding priorities. The focus remained on targeted priorities, but some courses such as languages were kept running because of the wellbeing they bring and also because of future demand.

Members asked about high lateness rates and strategies to improve this. Officers advised that attendance was very good, 94% for the current year, but there were

barriers such as public transport issues and personal challenges. A pilot programme last year had led to a programme being established this year whereby bus tickets were provided to learners. This had been effective in improving attendance, and without attendance, learners cannot achieve their outcomes. Mental health challenges were also a barrier to attendance. The team monitored attendance closely and worked to overcome individual barriers.

Members asked how the team could achieve an 'outstanding' rating instead of 'good'. Officers explained the challenges in achieving an outstanding rating and emphasised the importance of consistency across all classes and the efforts being made to address inconsistencies. Officers also highlighted the variability in inspectors' backgrounds and the impact it can have on evaluations. For example, inspectors may have a college background which was different to an adult education background. Officers acknowledged the hard work of the team and the continuous efforts to improve, and noted the high percentage of good and better ratings in adult education and the need for more sector-specific training for inspectors.

Members inquired about the search for new venues and the balance between capacity and funding. Officers noted the target funding allocation and the need to earn it throughout the year, further noting that they had always hit the target. Officers also noted the potential for increased funding with more capacity and staffing. There were challenges of being a small service within a large council trying to balance the budget and securing new venues was a complex issue. Officers emphasised the importance of capital bids and the barriers to quick approvals and stressed the need for more classrooms, especially in the South, to reach more people.

Members asked about the scale of recruitment challenges and the number of vacancies. Officers explained the difficulties in recruiting experienced staff, particularly for curriculum-related positions (as opposed to admin roles which tended to be filled quickly). Officers also noted the long-term vacancy for a tutor coordinator post and the challenges in finding suitable candidates. There was a reliance on sessional staff, who had subject knowledge and qualifications, and officers were keen not to use agency staff where possible. Officers highlighted the impact of long-term sickness and maternity leave on staffing, and described the successful volunteering programme that had helped develop internal staff. There were ongoing discussions with the GLA to develop teacher aid programmes at Levels 2 and 4 and overcome barriers to higher-level qualifications. Officers were hoping to get some support from the GLA to run a London-wide pilot.

Members asked about the size of the priority student population relative to the service's capacity. Officers explained that the target group included individuals who had negative school experiences, left without qualifications, or came from families with a history of low educational attainment. Many were older individuals who had managed without formal education. The focus was on building language skills and functional independence, as well as addressing health issues like obesity and diabetes. Approximately 67% of learners were based in the south of the borough, where there was a higher socio-economic need. Most learners did not pay fees due to their low income. Despite reaching the target group, the growing population meant the demand would likely never be fully met.

Members asked about the connection between courses, outreach, employment, and entrepreneurship, and the involvement of local businesses and the voluntary sector. Officers acknowledged the struggle to engage employers, despite focusing on

transferable skills. Lots of courses were entry level. Officers highlighted the importance of building confidence through volunteering. Strong links existed with schools, facilitated by the education team's restructuring. However, there was no dedicated role for partnership development, due to limited capacity. The person leading this effort had only recently returned from long-term sick leave, causing a temporary setback. The voluntary sector's needs had changed since COVID-19, making partnerships more fragmented. Despite these challenges, the service continued to support learners into work and sought to improve employer engagement. More could be done with more capacity.

Members asked about innovative approaches to recruitment and non-monetary rewards. Officers highlighted the success of the volunteer programme, which had led to many individuals transitioning into paid roles. Officers also emphasised the importance of growing internal talent due to the competitive job market. Two senior managers had started as learners. The service worked closely with other local authority providers to share resources and support. Career progression within the sector was limited due to low attrition rates, meaning staff often stayed in their role long-term. The service avoided using agency staff where possible and focused on developing its own workforce. A proposed pilot programme across London aimed to provide stepping stones for individuals with the right approach and experience to enter the education sector.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report

48. **MID-YEAR BUDGET UPDATE** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Officers expressed gratitude to the Children's Services directorate teams for their hard work in finding additional savings to balance the budget, noting that these were challenging times for local government due to significant funding reductions. Despite these challenges, the team, along with Cabinet Members, had worked diligently to create a budget.

It was a challenging budget, including significant savings targets of £30 million for 2025-26 and an additional £17 million for the following year. Officers noted the borough's relatively low Council Tax compared to other London boroughs, which kept more money in residents' pockets but limited the Council's available funds.

The budget included contingencies to mitigate risks. The recent grant settlement from central government had provided an additional £3.8 million, which was more than expected but still insufficient.

The Council faced enormous challenges in social care budgets, particularly for children and young people, as well as homelessness and temporary accommodation.

The Council had drawn on reserves over the years, and maintaining stability of reserves was crucial.

The government had promised a multi-year spending review, but only provided a one-year settlement this year. A three-year settlement next year would provide more certainty, but the actual funding levels remained uncertain. There were issues around balancing the schools funding block, particularly around SEND. A number of boroughs had asked for exceptional funding, but Hillingdon had not done so.

Revenue monitoring

There was a reported overspend of £8.9 million for 2024-25, with services within the remit of this Committee forecasting an overspend of £3 million, largely due to increased expenditure for looked after children. Early years centres also faced pressure, offset by underspends in staffing for the Children in Need service. The service area aimed to deliver £1.7 million in savings for 2024-25, with £1.2 million already banked or contracted for delivery, and £0.5 million recorded as either Amber 2 or Red. These savings were related to improving the foster offer and the Stronger Families Programme, which faced challenges this year.

Medium Term Financial Strategy

The consultation budget set out a savings requirement of £39 million for 2025-26, with £32.6 million identified so far, leaving a residual gap of £6.4 million. Over five years, the savings requirement was £62 million, with £65 million identified, resulting in a £3 million surplus by the end of the five-year period. However, reserves will need to be drawn down initially and then rebuilt in later years. Most of the savings requirement was driven by corporate items, including a £37.3 million increase in expenditure predominantly related to rebasing historic budget shortfalls and undelivered savings. An additional £16.9 million was attributed to demographics and inflation.

Children's Social Care and Savings

The increase in savings and spending requirements was driven by children's social care placements, with demographic growth accounting for a £0.4 million increase and inflation for social care placements at £0.5 million. A further £1.9 million was related to inflation for non-placements, mostly due to a pay award for 2025-26, estimated to be 3%.

Of the £5.2 million in savings related to services within the remit of this Committee for next year, key savings included £2.2 million from a review of semi-independent and shared accommodation, £1.1 million from a social care delivery model aimed at avoiding costly interventions, and £0.6 million from a new foster care offer, converting external foster placements to a lower-cost internally run service.

Capital Budget

The consultation budget set out a capital budget of £341.6 million over five years, with £13.6 million related to services within the Committee's remit. This included £11.3 million for increasing special education needs placements within identified school sites to support the DSG recovery plan, and £2.3 million for a programme of works to maintain school buildings and scout and guide group facilities.

Members noted that the DSG was forecasting an in-year deficit which was significantly lower than initial projections, and asked what provisions were in place if the statutory override should affect general reserves. Officers explained the DSG deficits were a national issue affecting many local authorities, not just Hillingdon. The likelihood of the statutory override ceasing was very low. If it did, this would become a national issue, requiring government intervention as local authorities could not be expected to cover these deficits immediately. Officers added that the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) had acknowledged the issue, stating that it can only be resolved by government. The team had worked hard to stabilise the position and maintain good service at schools. There was work ongoing on the target operating model.

Members asked about the confidence level in achieving the £32.6 million savings target, given past difficulties in meeting savings targets. Members sought clarity on the

deliverability of the budget without negatively affecting services. Officers acknowledged the challenging nature of the budget and the significant savings required, and noted that there were contingencies in place. Officers emphasised the importance of robust monitoring and contingency planning. The Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance & Transformation had ensured that all issues were on the table. The budget would be formally assessed via a Section 25 statement in February, which would provide a view on its robustness. There were national issues and Hillingdon was not unique in these.

Members raised concerns about the £5.2 million savings requirement in this Committee's remit, particularly the reduction in semi-independent and shared accommodation. Members highlighted past issues with finding accommodation for looked after children and the pressure on general needs property, and sought confirmation that the savings target was realistic and robust. Officers explained that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was looking to increase housing stock, with a planned increase of approximately 1,700 new homes. This would help alleviate pressure. In Children's Social Care, three work streams were in place: commissioning more affordable lettings within the borough, establishing internal pathways with earlier intervention, and implementing a rent guarantor scheme. These measures aimed to provide assurance to the private sector and maintain rent within housing benefit limits, ensuring Universal Credit and housing benefit applications were in place to prevent rent issues and arrears.

Members asked for clarification about the one-off £4 million adverse movement in the DSG due to previous years. Officers explained that a deep dive review of the balance sheet had revealed an income target that was no longer achievable. This income, previously held on the balance sheet, had to be written off of the balance sheet, resulting in a £4 million one-off impact on the current year's revenue position. The income was related to funds expected from the Department for Education (DfE).

Members asked about the confidence in achieving the target of using local foster carers instead of out-of-borough placements, given the difficulty in recruiting sufficient foster carers. Officers acknowledged this challenge but noted some success in increasing in-house fostering through ongoing campaigns. The service area planned to continue these campaigns and explore different models to achieve the target. The work has already started, providing some confidence for future success.

Members noted that earmarked reserves for this Committee were at zero and asked if there should be concerns about this, given inflationary pressures and the need to cut expenditure. Officers clarified that the table in the agenda showed the use of reserves in the financial year (and that the Committee had not drawn down any reserves) which was a positive. Officers added that contingencies had been built into the budget to address unforeseen pressures. Officers highlighted the challenges posed by changes in National Insurance and the need for government compensation. Officers emphasised the importance of maintaining services without absorbing all fiscal decision costs.

Members asked about assessments to ensure that the changes in social care delivery models do not compromise safeguarding standards. Officers explained that savings proposals went thorough review in Star Chamber sessions, involving social care, finance, legal, and other relevant groups. It was ensured the proposals were based on robust estimates and aimed to maintain service quality. The focus was on more appropriate settings rather than compromising safety. Officers added that services

leaders were passionate about their work and would not propose changes that put children at risk. The goal was to deliver strong services more cost-effectively through innovative approaches.

Members asked about the impact of the Council's zero-based budgeting on the work covered by this Committee. Officers explained that this process had been helpful in understanding the budgets, noting that this should not be a one-off exercise but an ongoing targeted effort. Officers highlighted the importance of examining prices and volumes in areas such as adult care, children's care, and temporary accommodation. The exercise had fostered collaboration between Cabinet Members and officers, resulting in the current budget. Future budget sessions would continue to involve both Members and officers to address challenging issues.

Members commended officers for delivering a balanced budget and asked about mechanisms to monitor and ensure accountability for the ambitious savings plans. Officers stressed the importance of continuous improvement and monitoring to avoid significant shocks. Officers also emphasised the need for Corporate Directors to own their budgets and be accountable for them. There was good engagement with Cabinet Members in creating the budget and officers noted the importance of leadership and accountability in maintaining a balanced budget.

Members asked how reductions in service budgets would impact frontline services, particularly for children with complex needs and those in alternative provision. Officers clarified that the savings were not intended to reduce the amount of service provided but to maximise efficiencies by targeting the most appropriate setting for each child. The goal was to maintain the same level of service while optimising resource allocation.

Members inquired about contingency plans if anticipated efficiency savings failed. Officers explained that the budget strategy included increased contingency funds for the next year. The general contingency had been increased from £0.5 million this year to £5.5 million, and an additional £4 million contingency had been set aside, totalling £9.5 million in contingency funds. This provided a level of protection for the Council. Officers added that the Council would protect the contingency funds to rebuild reserves, and emphasised the importance of holding people accountable for their commitments while being realistic about potential variances. Contingency funds would be used sensibly, with strong cases required for their release.

Members suggested it would have been useful to have more officers in attendance to explain how cost reductions in social care delivery and fostering could be achieved. This could be brought back to the relevant officers. Officers added that they were continuing to look at different models and different ways of working to see how they can deliver more efficiencies across their services. It was noted that the Corporate Director had sent her apologies for the current meeting.

Members sought clarification on 'smaller proposals' noted in the report and asked what these included. Officers explained that the smaller proposals were detailed in the consultation budget's Appendix A6. These included a review of the early years operating model, a staffing review in early years centres, and a review of catering in care delivery settings.

The Chair highlighted the recommendations to note the report and comment on the proposals. The Labour Group provided their own draft comments to the clerk for

consideration by the Chair. The Chair explained that, generally, the Labour Group would submit comments which the Chair would consider before agreeing on the Committee's final comments to Cabinet. Labour Members suggested that, previously, there had been an occasion whereby Labour Group comments had been included in a Cabinet report alongside those from the Conservative Group and confirmed that they wished to submit additional comments on this item. This would be checked.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Noted the budget projections contained in the report; and**
- 2. Delegated comments to Cabinet to the Democratic Services Officer in conjunction with the Chair, and in consultation with the Opposition Lead**

49. **SEND & AP STRATEGY UPDATE** (*Agenda Item 7*)

Officers provided an overview of the SEND & AP Strategy update. The strategy was approved in December 2023 and this update report covered the achievements over the past year. Officers noted the Ofsted inspection of SEND provision in April 2024, which led to the creation of an improvement plan. The strategy aligned with the areas identified in the Ofsted inspection, focusing on strengths and weaknesses. Officers emphasised the successful embedding of the strategy across partners, schools, and services within the Council, and expressed pride in the progress made and acknowledged the ongoing work needed.

Officers highlighted the rebranding to "SEND Local Area Partnership" and the emphasis on a local area partnership involving education, health, voluntary sector, young people and families. There had been a review and strengthening of the governance structure. There were ambition groups that reported to strategic boards, with multi-agency representation.

Officers noted the increase in SEND support data, indicating better identification of needs. In Autumn 2023, SEND Support was 11.8%. In Autumn 2024, the figure was 12.1%. Officers discussed the reshaping of the SEND Advisory Service to provide holistic support to teaching staff and the creation of new roles such as educational psychologists and improvement advisors.

Officers noted the significant work on annual reviews, focusing on improving quality and timeliness. Officers also noted the development of various pathways for early identification, including the multi-agency early years panel and the newly developed assessment centre at Ruislip Gardens for children with complex needs. This panel was working well. There had been an improvement in the timeliness of Education, Health and Care assessments, with compliance with the 20-week statutory deadline improving from 54% to 85%, and then achieving 100% in the last month.

The team was stable, and the core EHCP team was now fully permanent. This was important as it provided consistency.

Officers discussed the development of SEND reviews for schools within the SEND Advisory team and the higher uptake this year.

To further support schools, Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) had been reviewed and updated in collaboration with schools. This was guidance to support children within

the mainstream settings and would be published at the end of this month.

There were some challenges with some schools appearing to be magnets for SEND and efforts were underway to establish more consistent approaches across settings. There was a focus on a training offer for the workforce, including education, health, and social care partners around SEND.

Officers noted the introduction of exceptional funding to support schools with a higher percentage of children with SEND. Through the Phase Transfer process, officers and schools had collaborated in supporting students with EHCPs in Year 7.

There had been some success in involving young people through the SEND Youth Forum, which had co-produced a charter, logo, and local offer website page. Young people would be part of the governance and strategic boards, ensuring their voices were heard in the implementation of the strategy.

Members thanked officers for their work and asked about the recruitment of young people to be included in the strategic boards. Officers noted that there was a focus on ambition group 4 – preparation for adulthood, involving young people from mainstream schools, colleges, special schools, and supported internships. Hillingdon had a rich offer and a high number of young people accessing supported internships. The recruitment was voluntary, aiming for 10 permanent members, and adjustments were made to ensure inclusivity. Person-centred recruitment was important, as was representation of young people who may not have the ability to represent themselves.

Members asked about partnership working to ensure consistency of delivery across the borough and how parents' concerns were being addressed. Officers described a tiered approach to collaboration, involving representatives from various agencies in ambition groups, and task and finish groups. The improvement plan, which was underpinned by the strategies, had 105 strategic actions. Officers emphasised the importance of multi-agency collaboration and co-production with schools and other stakeholders including non-SEND partners. Officers worked closely with social care and were now working closer with health colleagues. There was a strong partnership with Hillingdon Parent Carer Forum and efforts to involve parents' voices in consultations. Officers were also working with schools to develop parental involvement outside of this forum.

Members commended the progressive improvement shown in the report and asked for an example of what significant improvement may look like in the next year. Officers noted several ongoing projects expected to be completed, including the OAP review, preparation for adulthood guidance, and the implementation of a banding model for special schools, which had been co-produced with schools. Officers highlighted the goal of improving the quality of EHCPs and annual reviews, and increasing the number of plans ceased due to young people achieving their outcomes. Multi-agency involvement in the annual review process was important, as was improving professionals' understanding of statutory advice. Officers were also hoping to see more ceasing of plans, where appropriate, due to young people achieving their outcomes over the next year. Officers added that a key aspiration for the year was to support schools in consistently supporting children with SEND, and acknowledged the variance in provision and support across schools. Officers emphasised the importance of building relationships with schools, being transparent about data, and sharing census data with schools to highlight disparities. The SEND team had been renamed as the EHC team to reflect their specific role and the focus on building in-person relationships with schools.

Members acknowledged the significant work done before and after the Ofsted inspection. Members noted that some schools had reported concerns that other local schools did not share an inclusive ethos. Officers agreed on the importance of strengthening inclusion and noted ongoing work to create an inclusion framework. This framework was being co-produced with school leaders to develop a consistent understanding of inclusion across Hillingdon. There was a need for a common understanding of terminology and interventions. Joint meetings between the SEND Advisory Services and EPS were being implemented and there was a review of training to SENCOs. Members asked and officers agreed to provide an update on SEND reviews within six months.

Officers clarified that the map in the report showed the concentration of EHCP needs, not the concentration of where children attend schools. Officers suggested sharing census data to highlight variances in inclusivity. There was a need to focus on secondary schools, where inclusivity was lower compared to primary schools.

Officers noted the disparity in EHCP percentages between primary and secondary schools (primaries at 3%, in line with national averages, secondaries at 2.5%), and noted the significant cost difference for children with EHCPs in year 6 compared to year 7. There was a need to work with secondary schools to prevent children from being placed in specialist or independent settings unnecessarily. There was ongoing work with the Centre for ADHD and Autism to support transitions to secondary schools and the creation of the EHCP Plus team of three specialist officers to support mainstream schools with cases of more complex needs. This was also aimed at benefiting parents as parental confidence was lower with the move to secondary school.

Members asked about the impact of the improved annual review process on schools and the feedback received so far. Officers explained that the new paperwork for annual reviews had not yet been implemented, but improvements had been made in preparation for adulthood questions and liaison meetings between EHCP coordinators and schools. There was an importance of collaboration and planning for annual reviews. There was ongoing work to ensure that the paperwork reflected the aspirations of young people and the pilot programme for preparation for adulthood from early years. Officers were going to introduce a task and finish group related to the quality assurance framework.

There were three pathways, primary, secondary and post-19. There had been an improvement in the post 16 phase transfer, which showed an increase of young people in the more vocational courses. A number of placements had been secured at Harrow College and officers were looking into more bespoke packages for young people with more complex needs based on their aspirations and ambitions.

Members commended the progress being made in meeting the 20-week timeframe for EHCPs but noted the 12% of cases not meeting the deadline. Members asked about the additional timeframe for these cases, and whether the 20-weeks target was a national figure. Officers explained that the 20-week time frame was a statutory duty and that Hillingdon's performance was above the national average of 50%. Delays were minimal, often just a few days or weeks, and were closely monitored. There had been improvements in consultation processes with schools to ensure timely responses.

Members complimented the quality of the report and the strategy. Members asked

about the distribution of primary diagnoses in the area and whether it raises questions about the diagnostic process. Officers clarified that primary needs in Hillingdon were similar to other London authorities, with autism and social, emotional, and mental health needs being the most common.

Members commended the ambitions as clear and laudable, and asked about the impact of cost pressures on the ambitions for SEND provision. Officers acknowledged the challenge of balancing costs with aspirations. Officers emphasised that the strategy incorporated targets from the safety valve agreement, aiming for cost-effective provision while delivering strong outcomes. Officers highlighted the dedication and retention of the team working towards these goals.

Members asked about the strategy's approach to critical transition phases, such as moving from primary to secondary and preparing young people for adulthood and employment. Officers described the co-production of the preparation for adulthood guidance, focusing on community, health, employment, and housing. Officers noted various initiatives, including transition panels, inclusive travel training, and supported internships. Officers had developed a carousel vocational offer with educational providers. Young people were involved in developing the strategy and there was a focus on bespoke packages for post-16 transitions. The SEND Youth Forum could be used as an avenue for feedback.

Members raised concerns about the lack of alternative provision for primary age children who had been excluded and asked about progress in this area. Officers explained that ambition #5 of the SEND & AP Strategy focused on flexible interventions for children in alternative provision. Officers commended the Education team's ongoing work to support settings and prevent suspensions and exclusions. Officers were developing support around emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA). Officers also explained the development of a dynamic purchasing system for alternative provision and the review of exclusion and suspension guidance including vulnerable learners support clinics. Officers emphasised the importance of early intervention and inclusion panels to provide support before suspensions occur.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the update

50. **SEND SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY** (*Agenda Item 8*)

Officers presented the draft SEND Sufficiency Strategy, developed over several months with extensive analysis. Officers highlighted the challenges around data in recent years and the improvements made in monitoring. The goal was ensuring sufficient high-quality specialist provision in both mainstream and special settings. The strategy was underpinned by the local area SEND provision and aimed to create a continuum of support for every need at the right time and place.

Officers provided updates on the local context, noting a 37% increase in the number of EHCPs over the last four years, with a recent slowdown in year-on-year growth to 4.6%. Officers noted that the primary need was autism, which had doubled in recent years, along with an increase in social, emotional and mental health needs. There was a higher percentage of children with an EHCP attending special schools (34.4%) compared to the national average (32.1%), but there was a focus on developing specialist provision within mainstream settings.

Officers discussed ongoing development projects, including an application for a free

school for 280 pupils and building work related to expansions and satellite provisions. Officers emphasised the importance of being responsive to the needs of the cohort and working with multi-academic trusts and architects to meet demand. There was a focus on promoting early intervention pathways and ensuring excellent education in local schools.

Members asked about the consultation process and the low number of responses received. Officers explained that the strategy was led by ambition group #3, which included representatives from special schools, SRPs, and mainstream settings. Officers noted that the low response rate was not surprising as the schools were already aware of the strategy and its goals through regular collaboration and sharing of census data.

Members asked about the long-term capacity needs and the number of SRPs and special schools required. Officers explained that the strategy was based on eight-year projections, considering the growth of children with SEND and the overall population. Officers noted the importance of early identification through the early years tracking panel and the need to develop secondary SRP provision to avoid bottlenecks. Continuous review and analysis of cohorts to anticipate needs and ensure sufficient places was important. Officers were confident in the current sufficiency of places. Ensuring feedback from young people was an important part of this.

Members suggested including forecast data on capacity and population projections in future updates of the strategy. Officers confirmed that projections were included in the SEND and AP Strategy and would continue to be reviewed and updated.

Members raised concerns about the lack of suitable SEND placements, resulting in some children remaining in unsuitable mainstream schools, and asked about the timetable to address this. Officers acknowledged the delays with developers and interim solutions while awaiting special school readiness which had led to some accepting only part of a cohort. Officers emphasised the importance of working closely with liaison meetings within the EHCP team and regular meetings with SENCOs to address any unsuitable placements. There was a commitment to supporting placements based on individual needs and parental preferences. There had been significant progress made since 2019, with 98% of school placements named at the point of phase transfer.

Members suggested including more detailed information about projections for special education capacity in the School Organisation Plan. Officers agreed and noted that the section on special education capacity had been updated with projections, particularly for secondary SRP provision. Officers agreed to this suggestion.

The Chair noted the recommendation to provide comments to Cabinet, which would be delegated.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Reviewed the draft SEND Sufficiency Strategy;**
- 2. Noted the 13 responses from the consultation in response to the proposed strategy: and**
- 3. Delegated comments for the Cabinet Member report to the Democratic**

	Services officer in conjunction with the Chair, and in consultation with the Opposition Lead
51.	<p>SELECT COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE UPDATE (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>Officers advised that following the recent update of the Cabinet portfolios and directorates, there had been an amendment to the Select Committee's Terms of Reference.</p> <p>Members asked if the updated Terms of Reference should explicitly state school place planning, as this was a statutory requirement. The Chair noted that this would come under Education & SEND, but officers would also check this.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted its updated remit</p>
52.	<p>FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 10</i>)</p> <p>Members considered the Forward Plan.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the Forward Plan</p>
53.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 11</i>)</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the March meeting was due to take place on 20 March, not 11 March.</p> <p>Members asked for an update on the major review. The Chair advised that now the witness sessions had been completed, officers would be consulted on draft recommendation ideas. Members asked and officers confirmed that Members were welcome to provide their own recommendation ideas ahead of any meeting with officers.</p> <p>The Chair also advised that Dylan McTaggart had attended to observe the meeting with a view to potentially attending as a witness to a future session on higher education.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee considered the report and agreed any amendments</p>
	The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 9.55 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Ryan Dell on democraton@hillingdon.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.