

Developing a Strategy for SEND in Essex

Public engagement

March 2019



Essex County Council

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About Essex County Council

Our high ambitions for Essex and Essex County Council have begun to be achieved.

Despite the ever-increasing financial challenges facing us, we have continued to provide the services residents and businesses need.

What we do is driven by four strategic aims: enabling inclusive economic growth, help people get the best start and age well, help create great places to live, work and grow up, and transform the council to achieve more with less.

Our strong track record of financial management has enabled us to do this, operating within a legally required balanced budget.

Last year, that meant finding over £1 million a week in efficiencies, through innovating to continue to provide services at lower cost, with greater efficiency. Increasing this has meant investing in digital services and seeking to generate income.

We also continued to invest in Essex infrastructure, a key element in driving economic growth.

Even greater challenges

How we are funded is changing. By the end of 2019/20, our main grant – the Revenue Support Grant – will have been phased out entirely and will be replaced by 75% business rates retention in 2020/21. This will mean a £27m reduction in 2019/20 and a further £18m in 2020/21. Overall, we will have lost some £184m in annual grant funding since 2014/15

Our income will instead come from council tax, business rates, grants which are specific to our services, general government grants and fees and charges.

As in previous years, we will aim to keep council tax as low as possible through generating income and revenue where people can afford to pay for services and where there is demand for them. Demographic changes – particularly an ever-aging, ever-growing population – which also create demand pressures, alongside inflation, also contribute to the financial pressures we face.

The combination of these factors means that, unless we think very differently about the services we offer and how residents and businesses access them, we will not succeed in delivering our ambitions for Essex.

Unless we change, reform and transform, the services we are responsible for will not keep pace with what people need and the changing world we live in.

This means that, alongside those services which we retain and continue to invest in, or invest even more in than in previous years, some of them will change, and some of them will no longer be provided where they are now.

Increasingly, digital platforms offer us new ways of connecting with individuals and communities, and of offering services.

Leveraging the power of data to help us understand where the most pressing needs and the key challenges are, allied to new, more citizen-friendly ways of dealing with those needs through digital platforms is how we will develop our approach. The way we shop, travel, work, learn and enjoy leisure time has been transformed over the past decade and the pace of change is ever increasing.

The information and analysis we now have at our disposal means we design services better for the present and the future. We need to make sure we seize that opportunity.

Essex County Council has embarked upon a programme of change for provision and services with the ambition to profoundly improve the outcomes and life experience of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The purpose of this engagement

We want to share our vision with you, understand what is important to you and work with you to address the challenges we face. We are seeking your views on our strategy and particularly the three pillars underpinning a transformed SEND system for Essex, as set out in this paper:

1. Enabling and supporting the development of a school led SEND system;

2. Essex's SEND capital programme to create new specialist provision;
3. The future design and ways of working of Essex's SEND services.

This consultation will run for ten weeks from 22nd March 2019 to 31st May 2019 and you can contribute by responding to our [online survey](#) or by participating in the sessions with the Essex Family Forum. Further details about how you can be involved are at the end of this paper.

Our vision for SEND in Essex

Our vision is that regardless of age, stage, unique characteristics or circumstances our children and young people with SEND will have an education which provides:

- A positive experience of learning;
- A sense of belonging, value and worth;
- Aspirational outcomes;
- The right support at the right time;
- Information and opportunities to enable informed decision making, choice and control;
- Successful, planned transition at any point of movement, between phases or settings;
- Thoughtful and thorough preparation for their future progression to a fulfilling adult life.

Our vision is for a SEND system which identifies and assesses need at an earlier stage and which provides appropriate and impactful support without such high dependence on Essex County Council's statutory services.

We would like our children, young people and families to have confidence in the type, quality and amount of support received and see year on year impact of the support in their child's life.

Wherever possible we want to meet need locally through Essex schools by supporting those schools to extend their capacity to offer effective provision.

We aim to ensure that we have sufficient special school and enhanced provision places in Essex to meet the needs of our young people.

Working in partnership

We are committed to ensuring that the voice of children, young people and their families are at the heart of the services we deliver and commission.

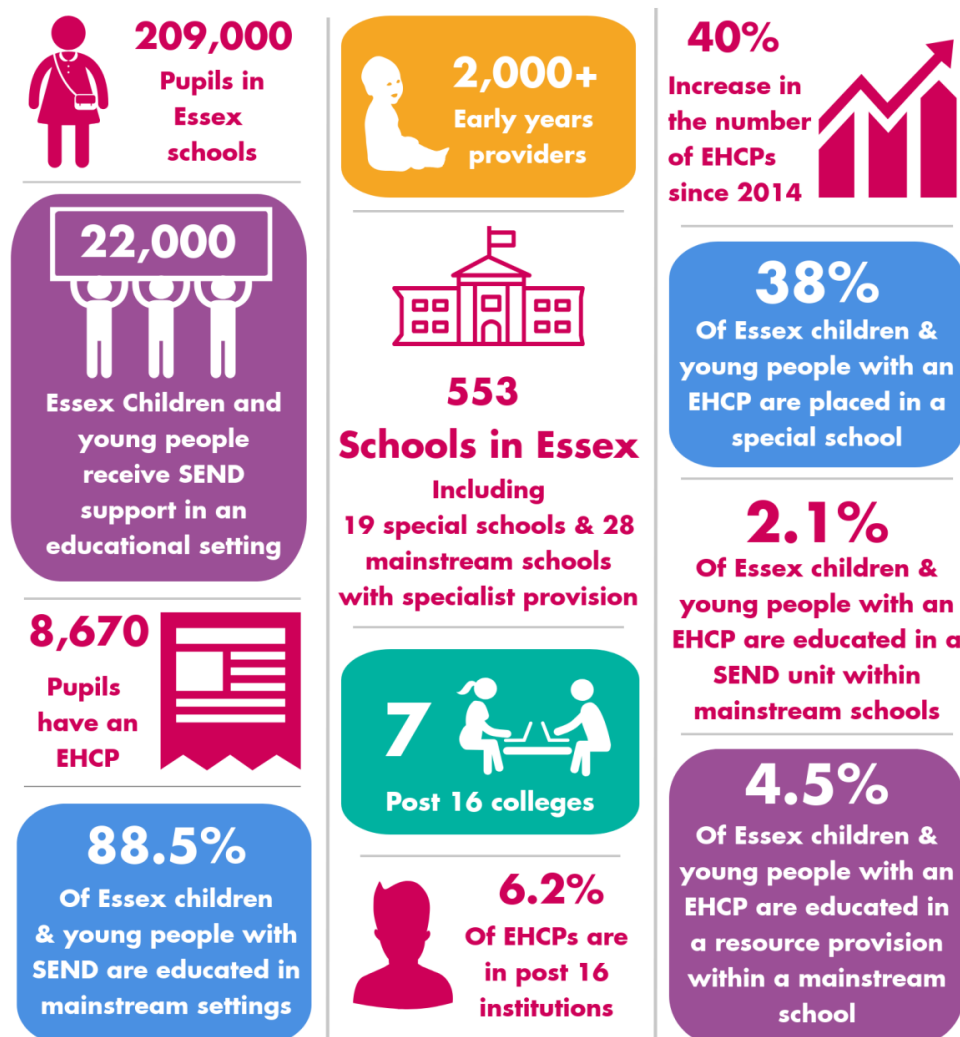
We will continue working closely with all schools and education settings to support the development of a school led SEND system. We see schools and education settings as our key partners in delivering transformation.

All improvements will be driven in partnership with education settings and the Essex Family Forum. The Essex Family Forum is an independent group of parents and carers for children and young people with disabilities and/or additional needs aged 0-25 who are passionate about empowering parents and influencing the decisions that affect families. The Forum's purpose is to work with Essex County Council, education settings, health commissioners and other providers to ensure that the lived experiences of families brings about positive change.

We want to coproduce the SEND strategy and the action plan to achieve this strategy, and will seek to engage as many parents, carers, families and children and young people as possible.

Our commitment is to continue to work in partnership with parents, carers, families and children and young people beyond the end of this formal engagement period.

Where we are now



Budget

The High Needs Block (HNB), the budget which funds support for children and young people with SEND, has been under significant pressure over the last two years with large overspends forecast in future years. The increased pressures on the budget are due to a number of factors:

- The increased number of children and young people with an EHCP in Essex;
- An increase in the number of places commissioned at special schools and enhanced provisions to meet need for a rising pupil population (these places are costlier than places in mainstream schools);
- More children and young people have had to be educated at more costly independent special schools as Essex special schools are at full capacity;
- The number of young people with SEND who are funded in education beyond the age of 16 has increased significantly.

We have a responsibility to deliver effective services and support within budget, which will not be possible if the current situation continues and we do not make changes. The increasing cost has meant that we have had to seek additional funding from the general schools budget. In 2019/20 we have got special permission from the Secretary of State to remove £4.2m from the general schools budget to reduce the overspend on the High Needs Block. This reduces the funding available for every student in Essex.

If we do not take action, then the budget will continue to overspend and further applications may well not be approved.

We are not proposing to reduce the budget, but to take action to ensure that services are delivered and outcomes achieved within budget and to prevent overspend.

What families of children and young people with SEND have told us

In 2017, Essex County Council undertook a review of our SEND offer. We asked questions of Essex County Council teams, headteachers, health professionals, young people with SEND and parents and carers.

The review helped us analyse information about the cohort of individuals with SEND in Essex, evaluate what has changed to date and what is likely to change in the future.

The family survey helped us to better understand the scale of some of the issues, for example the number of families that know about the Essex Local Offer and how well a child's EHCP reflects their aspirations. It also enabled us to measure parents' satisfaction and priorities for the improvement of SEND provision in Essex.

The main findings highlighted:

Parents had many positive comments about the support their child receives at school. The two most common answers were 'good' and 'helpful' but some families qualified their comment with a 'but', for example, good *but confusing*, helpful *but slow*. Overall, 70% of families are satisfied with the support their child receives at school, with 48% of families agreeing that the quality of SEN support is excellent.

Parents recognised the effort that schools and education settings are making. Many parents felt well supported by their child's school, felt listened to and agreed that their child's school genuinely tries to include pupils with SEND. Families generally felt more positive about the quality and amount of support their child received when their child had an EHCP, rather than a One Plan. However, plans for children and young people do still vary in quality and effectiveness.

The statutory assessment process was seen as unnecessarily complicated and lengthy. Some people told us that they believe that processes are not equal across different locations in Essex.

Relationships and communication between SEND stakeholders across Essex can at times be difficult, with some families describing their experience as a 'fight'. There is a need for improved communication between teams and services to ensure that families need only tell their story once.

Some people told us that they lack confidence in some SEND services, with communication and timeliness of action being the greatest frustrations.

Our challenges and our ambitions:

1. We have a high and increasing demand for specialist provision. We want to meet need locally.

Many Essex special schools are currently at maximum capacity and are not able to meet the identified future growth in demand without expansion. We are not yet using our enhanced provisions (specialist SEND units that are attached to a mainstream school) to maximum effect; some are over capacity and some have places that are not being filled.

We have seen a recent increase in the number and cost of Essex pupils educated in special schools outside Essex. We have also seen an increase in the number of children and young people educated in independent special schools.

Part of this increase is because there are gaps in provision in Essex, particularly for children with autism or complex social, emotional and mental health needs. If trends continue as they are we will see more children being placed outside Essex in special and independent special schools at significant additional cost.

Travelling long distances to school can be very challenging for children and young people and can reduce the effectiveness of placements. The cost of travel also has an impact on the transport budget. In 2017-18 Essex spent over £13.5 million transporting approximately 2,700 children and young people with SEND to school.

Simply put, too many children and young people have to go to a school too far from home in order to have their education, health and care needs met. There are large pressures on all of our special schools with regard to pupil numbers and admissions and, in some cases, with their physical capacity in an aging building. If growth in the number of children with an EHCP continues at its current rate, it is going to outstrip the planned new provision in 3 to 5 years. Placements outside of Essex are costly and can be challenging for families to have their child away from their home.

2. We have a growing number of requests for EHCPs. We want to improve parental confidence in the local SEND system.

The Parent Survey 2018 indicated that there is a wide variety in the levels of confidence that parents have in the SEND support that children and young people receive. Parents recognise the effort that schools and education settings make but feel that the amount and quality of support is inconsistent from school to school. Parents feel that not all teachers and settings are well equipped to meet their children's needs and feel some schools and settings need more support.

This is demonstrated in the growing number of applications for an EHC Needs Assessment each year. In the school year 2017/18 we had 2,314 requests for an assessment. This is nearly five hundred more than the year before.

We have also seen a significant rise in the number of appeals to SEND Tribunals. The main reasons for appeals and tribunals are lack of capacity at the parent's preferred school.

Simply put, where 'One Planning' is effective, families feel well supported and engaged and confident that their child is making good progress towards their outcomes. However, this picture is not consistent across all settings. Lack of confidence in the amount or quality of support a child receives is a common reason for applications for an EHC Needs Assessment.

3. We have too many children not receiving a full-time education. We want all our schools to feel confident to support all children with additional needs, but particularly children and young people with behaviours that challenge.

The education system in Essex is inclusive; most Essex children and young people with SEND (88.5%), are educated in mainstream settings including two out of three children with an EHCP.

However, we know that children and young people who are identified as having social, emotional and mental health needs currently do not achieve well in Essex. Not all Essex schools feel confident to manage behaviours that challenge. There are also growing concerns around children and young people's mental health support.

There is also evidence, some anecdotal but much based on known cases, of informal exclusions, extended periods of part-time provision and some parents feeling that elective home education is their only option.

Our exclusion data shows that in 2016/17, 55 out of 105 (52%) pupils permanently excluded were categorised as having SEND. Just under half of all fixed period exclusions (44%) were received by pupils with SEND.

We also have a small, but significant number of children and young people with SEND who are being educated in alternative provisions while waiting for their EHCP assessment to be completed or for a specialist placement.

These rising levels of permanent exclusions impact across all settings.

Simply put, too many children with SEND are not accessing a full-time education.

Our proposed plan for the future of Services for Children with SEND in Essex

We will strive to support all educational providers in Essex to deliver high quality education for children and young people with SEND, maximising value from the funding available. Wherever possible we will seek to commission good and outstanding provision for all children and young people within or as close to their community as possible.

We recognise that achieving our ambition is dependent on a change of culture and new ways of working across the SEND system as a whole and we are committed to driving this change.

We see these changes being supported by the following three ‘pillars’:

1: ‘Enabling and supporting the development of a ‘School Led SEND system in Essex’

What is a School Led SEND system?

This is a different way of working that enables, supports and empowers schools, leaders and local areas to drive the changes that they want to see. It enables schools to support and develop good practice and to identify the areas for improvement that is needed in a family of schools.

It means schools, parents and the County Council working together within a local area to make the best use of the SEND expertise that exists in our schools and education settings, within the Essex County Council SEND teams and in voluntary and community groups. Together, it helps schools to identify special educational needs and promptly access the right support at the right time. Together, it ensures that families and young people have the information and opportunities to enable informed decision making, choice and control.

What have we done to support the creation of a School Led SEND system in Essex?

Essex has established a SEND roundtable of headteachers; they are working to influence the culture and behaviours of schools and settings across Essex to be more inclusive to all children and to meet need effectively in their local area. The roundtable has written an ‘Inclusion Statement’ which schools across Essex are adopting. Work is moving forward on an ‘Every Schools Inclusive Offer’ which lays out clearly for all what a school should be providing as a minimum offer to all children.

Schools and education settings are taking part in the ‘Essex SEND Peer Review’ programme, where leaders of schools work together to identify and improve their offer to children, young people and families.

We are also working with schools, families and voluntary groups to improve the quality of our annual reviews. We are using an ‘Appreciative Inquiry’ method which invites everyone involved to tell their story of how the review process works for them. We can then build on the success stories that exist in Essex and learn from the experiences of teachers, families and young people who tell us where things could be better.

What would be different?

We proposed that there will be a clear focus on identifying and improving SEND practice in all our schools and settings, supporting headteachers, SENCOs and teachers to identify and lead the improvements, based on their children, in their local area.

School leaders would work collectively to support and challenge each other to provide the best possible education for children and young people with SEND in their local area. Our ambition is that all schools offer the same vision: a positive experience of learning; a sense of belonging, value and worth and aspirational outcomes for our children and young people with SEND.

Our specialist settings will be able to offer more outreach work to mainstream schools to share their expertise and help them to meet the needs of the children and young people in their schools.

How will we know that this has been successful for our children and young people, their families and schools and settings?

- ✓ We will have a shared ambition and collective drive to achieve a 'fair share' approach towards children and young people with additional and high needs in each locality.
- ✓ We have established communities of good existing practice, with schools, and settings that provide peer to peer support and who work effectively in clusters to meet the needs of children with SEND within their community.
- ✓ All schools and settings will consistently and confidently use One Planning, the Essex Provision Guidance and Every Schools Inclusive Offer (ESIO).
- ✓ We will meet the needs of children with additional needs effectively through One Planning and accurately identify the high needs that require statutory involvement.
- ✓ There is increased parental confidence in all elements of the SEND system.
- ✓ The Essex Family Forum is embedded as key to the strategic development of our local SEND system.
- ✓ The number and rate of permanent and fixed term exclusions from Essex schools decreases: there is greater attendance and engagement.
- ✓ There is a decrease in the number of children and young people with EHCPs who are taken out of school by their parents to be home educated
- ✓ We have further improved progress to exceed regional and national indicators for children and young people with SEND
- ✓ A reduction in the numbers of young people with SEND who are NEET.

2: Growing the specialist SEND provision in Essex

What is specialist SEND provision?

Special schools and the enhanced provisions attached to mainstream schools which provide specialist support.

What does 'Growing the specialist SEND provision' mean?

We are building new special schools which will offer over 250 new places through the free school programme by 2022. We are creating new places in some of our existing Essex special schools (Lexden Springs, Oak View and Southview schools). We are establishing new boarding facilities in some Essex special schools (Glenwood and Lexden Springs) to extend the support that we can offer to those children and young people with the most severe needs. We are growing the number of enhanced provisions in our mainstream schools for children and young people with autism and social, emotional and mental health needs.

What would be different?

We are working towards having an Essex school place for every Essex child. Wherever possible we want to meet children's need locally and through high quality specialist provision within our mainstream schools. We want to create the places in our special schools for our children with the most complex needs so their needs are met close to their home and families.

How will we know that this has been successful for our children and young people, their families and schools and settings?

- ✓ More children and young people will be placed in the right school/ setting in Essex to meet their individual needs;
- ✓ Parents and practitioners have confidence in the quality of our specialist provisions, particularly for those with the highest levels of need.
- ✓ Our enhanced provisions and special schools serve as centres of excellence for identification, training and outreach
- ✓ More children and young people will remain in their placement without the need to move throughout their education
- ✓ Better planning and forecasting for the future, taking into account population growth and changing trends in the profile of need, to ensure sufficient resources and provision;

- ✓ More young adults with SEND are able to maintain their independence and have access to supported employment.

3: A re-design and new approach for the Essex County Council SEND teams

Currently the Essex County Council SEND teams comprise an Educational Psychology Service, the Specialist Teacher and Pre-School teams and the Statutory Assessment Service. These practitioners work with our schools and settings to improve the practice in schools, assess children's needs and meet our statutory duties in preparing and reviewing EHCPs.

We have completed the first phase of the redesign of the SEND services delivered by ECC which has established four new quadrant teams with dedicated leadership for SEND. A new SEND Strategy and Innovation team has been created to drive the internal and external transformation of the SEND system across Essex.

The next phase of redesign, starting this Spring, will see the redesign of the Educational Psychology Service, the Specialist Teacher and Pre-School teams and the Statutory Assessment Service.

What are the responsibilities of the SEND Teams currently?

Currently the parts of the SEND service can operate separately but are sometimes working with the same education setting (preschool, school or college), children/ young people and families. There is often a need to co-ordinate a joined up approach or to handover between different professionals.

- 1. The Educational Psychology (EP) team** provide independent professional advice to young people, families and education settings (pre-schools, schools and colleges) to support the learning, development and wellbeing of children and young people up to 25 years of age. Many Essex EPs have specialist skills in areas such as autism, behaviour, literacy and mental health.

To access the team; a school, preschool or ECC may request support from an EP to investigate needs in greater depth, help plan support or to provide support and training for staff in the education setting.

- 2. The Preschool Specialist Teacher team** provides advice and practical support for families and early years' practitioners related to; identification, assessment and intervention to meet the needs of babies and young children (from 0 to 5 years) with SEND. Children with high needs are supported through their transition to school by the service, which may include contribution to the development of an EHCP, particularly where those children are entering a special school.

To access the team; health professionals, such as GPs or health visitors, make initial referrals to the Preschool service.

- 3. The Specialist Teacher team** provides specialist advice and support to staff within mainstream primary schools to build their capacity in meeting the needs of those pupils with SEND (aged 4-11). The team provides advice and support on effective teaching techniques and strategies, classroom management and curriculum development alongside a range of staff training and development opportunities. The team provides support for the transition of pupils from their primary school placement into the start of Year 7 only, unless the child has a sensory or physical impairment (see below). Some short term, direct work is undertaken with families where necessary, particularly in relation to children with autism and social-emotional difficulties.

To access the team; primary schools can utilise the consultancy service via telephone, drop-ins or scheduled school visits. The service facilitates a range of professional networks for school staff, and delivers a SEND training programme.

- 4. The Sensory Specialist teacher function** currently forms part of the specialist teacher and preschool teams. They are the only part of the service that supports mainstream secondary schools (as well as preschool and primary) and that support is in relation to pupils who have sensory (visual, hearing, multi-sensory) and physical impairments.

- 5. The Statutory assessment service** is responsible for initiating and managing the statutory assessment process, issuing and reviewing EHCPs and arranging provision and placements for pupils with EHCPs as required by the SEND 0-25 years Code of Practice.

To access the team; an assessment can be requested by a parent; a young person between the ages of 16 and 25; an early-years setting or school or any professional working with the child or young person.

What will the responsibilities of the redesigned SEND teams be?

In the future we would like the teams to work seamlessly together to deliver a co-ordinated service for 0-25 year olds with SEND. There will be an increased focus on earlier intervention and providing appropriate and impactful support without the need for the high level of dependence on the statutory system.

We propose to replace the current service with two teams:

- The SEND Inclusion Team
- SEND Operations Team

We propose that the SEND Inclusion team will:

- Support schools, academies and education settings to be equally and effectively inclusive, accessing the provision and support the need to meet children/ young people's needs without needing recourse to the statutory system. This will include the provision of high-quality professional advice and support to clusters of schools and education settings, at the earliest possible opportunity, increasing the capacity of those schools and education settings to meet the needs of the children and young people with SEND.
- Enable schools and education settings to create and maintain successful placements within Essex, without the need for children/young people to move throughout their education. This will include supporting schools and settings in planning for and ensuring successful transfer/ transition (deploying targeted support where necessary), contributing to the planning and implementation of plans and working in partnership with schools, education settings and other services to prevent exclusion.
- Enable, support and develop the school-led SEND system, where clusters of schools are supported and empowered to make decisions based on accurate assessment of need. This will include working within multi-professional teams around groups of schools and settings, identifying and responding to needs, both in terms of individual children and young people as well as workforce development and systems work.
- Gather and share evidence on what is working well and use this to raise performance. This will include facilitation of peer-to-peer support and challenge, addressing areas for development and sharing best practice, bringing together expertise that already exists within schools and settings as well as within other professional groups.

We propose that the SEND Operations team will:

- Effectively co-ordinate the EHCP process for those children/ young people in need of a statutory plan. This will include administration of the 20-week statutory assessment process, the annual review and arranging provision and placements for pupils with EHCPs.
- Provide targeted support to schools, education settings and families to enable the successful implementation of plans (One Planning or EHCP) for children with SEND. This will include modelling and coaching school and education setting staff and families to implement the evidence based strategies identified through the planning process.
- Deliver targeted support to schools, education settings and families to enable successful transition for children with SEND. This will include developing the practice to plan for and execute effective transition of pupils with plans; for

example, in to preschool, primary or secondary school, post 16 and inward transfers to the county.

- Strengthen the links between education settings, schools, families, social care and health services. This will include working collaboratively with other agencies, such as social care and health, in relation to pupils with SEND and acting as the main link for parents, schools and settings during the EHCP process.

What would be the benefit of the new teams?

The ECC SEND teams will work more closely with schools and other settings to help them to understand and provide the support and expertise that schools and education settings need to meet their children's needs. Teams will support schools to ensure aspirational outcomes for all children and young people with SEND and improve planning for transition at any point of movement, between phases or settings

The new teams will help to create a more effective partnership between schools, families and our voluntary and community groups. We will be able to provide the support that schools and education settings require to improve their understanding, expertise and SEND offer to children, young people and families.

Working closely with social care, colleges and employers we will develop local employment opportunities, build resilience, remove barriers and enable young people with SEND to access and sustain employment.

How will we know that this has been successful for our children and young people, their families and schools and settings?

- ✓ We will offer consistent, high quality support for leaders, teachers and SENCOs to ensure a culture of inclusion, understanding and support within the whole school culture.
- ✓ We can demonstrate our commitment to our 'In Partnership' value, understanding our local challenges and moving forward together. We will engage in dialogue that is meaningful, and not tokenistic, openly sharing a problem and enabling parents, carers and young people to generate ideas and shape solutions
- ✓ We have improved the SEND support that is available to the families of children and young people with SEND. Families feel listened to and interactions are felt to be responsive, helpful and warm
- ✓ Relationships between schools/settings and ECC will be more positive and effective;
- ✓ We have smooth transitions and joined up planning for children and young people as they move between stages and settings

- ✓ We begin Preparing for Adulthood at the earliest age and have a 'Preparing for Adulthood' (PfA) strategy in place across the County.
- ✓ We have a culture of high aspiration for employment and meaningful community opportunities for our young people with SEND.

Overall, we believe that our proposals will enable us to continue meet the needs of the growing number of children with SEND and grow capacity. We will grow the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the needs of children with SEND and increase the number of special school places for children whose needs cannot be met in a mainstream setting. We seek to do this without the need to further reduce funding available for mainstream schools. No child will lose access to long term support they currently receive as a result of these proposals.

Before we make a final decision on the strategy, we would like your views on our proposals

You can do this by:

- Answering the questions in our [online survey](#)
- Engaging in the events and workshops being led by our partners in the Essex Family Forum; further details of these sessions and how to be involved will be shared when they have been arranged, via the [Local Offer](#) and the [Essex Family Forum](#). The sessions will take place over three weeks beginning 29th April 2019. Venues and times will be announced shortly.