

Report to CABINET

SEND Reform Fund and Programme

Officer Contact: Julie Daniels, Executive Director Children and Young People

Report Author: Sheila Garara, Assistant Director Children's Services Integration

Email: Sheila.garara@oldham.gov.uk

3 August 2026

Reason for Decision

The delivery of the Oldham SEND Reforms Plan requires sustained, coordinated leadership, robust programme governance, and strengthened performance and data capability across the partnership.

The scale and complexity of SEND reforms, alongside the requirement to demonstrate impact against the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England expectations and inspection frameworks (Ofsted/CQC), necessitates a dedicated programme function to ensure delivery is systematic, accountable, and evidence-based.

Without dedicated programme capacity, there is a significant risk that the partnership will be unable to deliver the required pace and quality of reform or demonstrate sufficient progress against DfE/NHS England and inspection frameworks.

Recommendations

- To note the council's implementation of the SEND Reforms in Oldham.
- To accept the £2,397,793 Experts and Hand and Transformation Fund
- To approve option 1 for the establishment of a dedicated, time-limited programme team to enable the delivery of the Oldham SEND Reform Plan submitted to the department for Education funded by the Experts at Hand & Local Authority SEND Transformation Fund
- To delegate authority for future decisions regarding the delivery of the programme, resources and use of the Experts and Hand and Transformation Grant to the Executive Director Children and Young People, in consultation with the portfolio holder and the Director of Finance.

SEND Reform Fund and Programme

1 Background

Every Child Achieving and Thriving

- 1.1 The local area SEND partnership is required to implement and deliver a comprehensive programme of reforms by 2028/29, as outlined in the Every Child Achieving and Thriving School's White Paper (see appendix 1) and SEND reform: putting children and young people first consultation (see appendix 2), to improve outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- 1.2 This includes:
- Delivering against the local area SEND reform plan, approved by the DfE
 - Meeting national policy and statutory requirements
 - Strengthening multi-agency partnership working across education, health and care
 - Preparing for, and responding to, Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspections
 - Demonstrating measurable improvement in outcomes and experiences for children, young people and families including quarterly reporting to the DfE
- 1.3 The reforms introduce:
- Individual Support Plans (ISPs) for pupils at SEN Support
 - Inclusion Bases (reconfiguring SEND units and resourced provision) backed by year-on-year capital funding
 - A national Experts at Hand model for rapid multidisciplinary advice
 - Investment in the workforce and Best Start Family Hubs
 - Revised accountability, inspection and complaints routes
 - National inclusion standards and an updated SEND Code of Practice

Vision and strategy

- 1.4 Through a strong partnership approach, we expect to realise our vision and ambition; A fair, sustainable and inclusive system that identifies and supports needs early, equips partners and leads to better outcomes for our children and young people.

Building Blocks of the Reforms

Strengthening inclusion across education settings	System leadership, partnership and co production	Access to specialist and targeted support	Encouraging inclusive culture and behaviours
---	--	---	--

Key Enablers

Targeted capital investment	Workforce culture, training and development	Programme management and analytical capacity	Data and digital systems	Clear communication	Joint commissioning arrangements	Quality assurance and oversight
-----------------------------	---	--	--------------------------	---------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------------

Workstreams				
Fair	Shared	Local	Early	Effective
1.5	The SEND reforms programme is complex, involving multiple workstreams and projects across partner organisations, significant cultural and practice change, and the need for robust governance, programme and risk management, performance oversight, and evidence of impact.			
1.6	Learning from previous programme delivery, inspections and sector best practice demonstrates that successful delivery of national reforms requires a clearly defined programme structure, with dedicated leadership, delivery management, and analytical capacity.			
1.7	£429 million has been made available through the Experts at Hand & Local Authority SEND Transformation Fund (see appendix 3) over a three year period to support local area partnerships to invest in transformation and expansion of earlier intervention and prevention support. This will build on the extensive existing spend from local authority, partners and other agency budgets on SEND services.			
1.8	Oldham Council has been allocated £2,397,793 from the Fund in FY2026/27, subsequent years' funding is yet to be confirmed, however there is an expectation that around 10% of the new funding will be spent on the costs of transformation, ensuring leaders have the capacity to undertake this important reform, as well as to support the delivery of local area partnership services under a new Experts and Hand operating model, commissioning of services, training and development and any areas identified as the programme develops and as further guidance is issued by the DfE.			
1.9	Based on the indicative national funding profile published for the programme, it is anticipated that funding will increase significantly over the remainder of the Spending Review period, rising from £429 million in 2026/27 to approximately £750 million in 2027/28 and £850 million in 2028/29. Assuming Oldham Council continues to receive a broadly consistent proportion of the national allocation, this could equate to indicative funding of approximately £4.2 million in 2027/28 and £4.8 million in 2028/29, compared with the confirmed 2026/27 allocation of £2.4 million. These figures are indicative only and remain subject to confirmation by Government, including any future changes to the funding methodology, distribution formula, or programme requirements.			

2 Current Position

Purpose and recommended SEND programme resources

- 2.1 The purpose of the dedicated programme team is to provide the additional programme management, delivery coordination, governance, and data insight capacity required to successfully implement SEND reforms and sustain improvement, as recommended in the funding determination outlined in Appendix 2. Working under the strategic direction of the Assistant Director of SEND and Inclusion, the team will support delivery of the Oldham SEND Reform Plan and wider SEND & Inclusion Improvement Programme across the local area partnership. The team will report to the Assistant Director of Children's Services Integration and will strengthen programme oversight, partnership accountability, performance management, and evidence of impact.
- 2.2 The team will be employed by the council on fixed term contracts, for the three-year period of the programme.

2.3 Should successful appointments not be made for fixed term contracts, for any interim professionals, the REED consultancy framework will be utilised as the Council's approved Managed Services Provider (MSP). In the absence of any suitable candidates via the REED MSP, the Commercial Procurement Unit will be engaged to consider compliant frameworks as an alternative means of recruiting.

2.4 The proposed team structure is:

Programme Manager (Strategic Lead, SM2, 1.0 FTE, 3 years)

- Provide overall leadership of the SEND reforms programme
- Ensure alignment to partnership priorities and statutory requirements
- Lead programme governance and reporting across the local area partnership
- Drive system-wide transformation and cultural change
- Ensure delivery of milestones, outcomes and benefits realisation
- Maintain a robust and auditable evidence base for inspection and assurance

Project Manager (Grade 8, 1.0 FTE, 3 years)

- Manage the delivery of individual reform projects and workstreams
- Track progress against plans, milestones, and deliverables
- Ensure delivery to agreed outputs, outcomes, timescales, and quality standards
- Identify and escalate risks, issues, and dependencies
- Support programme governance processes

Programme Support Officer (Grade 5, 1.0 FTE, 3 years)

- Provide programme planning, coordination, and governance support
- Maintain programme documentation, reporting cycles, and action tracking
- Manage risk, action, issue and dependency logs and reporting
- Coordinate communication and data collection across partners

Senior Data Analyst (Grade 8, 1.0 FTE, 3 years)

- Develop and implement the SEND outcomes framework
- Enhance data maturity and reporting capability across the partnership
- Lead on performance dashboards and analysis
- Provide insight to inform decision-making and continuous improvement
- Ensure robust tracking against reform plan measures
- Support quarterly reporting requirements to DfE/NHS England

Expected outcomes of the programme team include:

- Clear programme oversight and accountability
- Delivery of SEND reforms to agreed timescales and standards
- Improved partnership working and governance
- Robust evidence base for Ofsted/CQC inspections
- Improved data quality, insight, and performance tracking
- Demonstrable improvements in outcomes for children and young people with SEND

2.5 **Service Leads** – already in the business to contribute to and oversee the reforms as part of developing the programme into business-as-usual activity.

2.6 **Corporate and partnership support** - We envisage corporate and partnership support and resources will be required from services such as Communications, Human Resources (HR) and Organisational Development, Finance, Information Governance, IT, Data and Insight, Property and Estate services, Legal, Project Management Office and Procurement to deliver the SEND Reform Plan.

Programme governance

-
- 2.7 The SEND Reform programme, supported by the programme team, will be driven by the Local Inclusion Partnership Executive Board independently chaired by the Chief Executive of POINT and overseen by the Transformation and Improvement Executive Board chaired by the Chief Executive and the Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Risks

- 2.8 Failure to establish a dedicated SEND Reforms Programme Team presents significant risks:
- Failure to deliver the SEND reform plan within required timescales
 - Inability to demonstrate sufficient progress to DfE, NHS England, Ofsted, and CQC
 - Adverse inspection outcomes, including potential for escalation or intervention
 - Weak programme governance and oversight, leading to fragmented delivery
 - Insufficient data and evidence, limiting ability to demonstrate impact and outcomes
 - Increased pressure on existing services, leading to burnout and reduced effectiveness
 - Reputational risk to the Council and partners
 - Missed opportunity to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND

Establishing a dedicated programme team mitigates these risks by ensuring structured, accountable, and well-governed delivery of the SEND reforms programme.

3 Options/Alternatives

3.1 Option 1 – Accept the fund and do not establish a dedicated SEND programme team

Approve the establishment and recruitment and / or procurement of a dedicated SEND Reforms Programme Team as outlined above to provide the necessary capacity, capability, leadership and pace to deliver the programme.

This is the recommended option as it ensures:

- Focused leadership and accountability
- Robust programme management and governance
- Sufficient capacity to deliver complex system reform
- Strong evidence and readiness for inspection
- Improved ability to manage risk and demonstrate impact

3.2 Option 2 – Accept the fund and do not approve a dedicated team and utilise existing resources

Do not establish and recruit and / or procure a dedicated programme team and instead seek to deliver SEND reforms through existing service capacity.

This option is not recommended due to:

- Limited existing capacity across services already delivering statutory reform programmes and functions
- Lack of dedicated programme management capability
- Competing transformation and improvement priorities reducing focus on SEND reforms
- Insufficient data and analytical capacity to demonstrate impact

4 Preferred Option

- 4.1 Option 1 is the preferred option as it will enable the council to deliver the reform programme at pace in line with national expectations and guidelines.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 Services across Children and Young People directorate, Executive Leadership, members, wider local area partnership and children, young people and families will be consulted throughout the design, development and implementation of the programme supported by HR and Trade Unions.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 This report seeks approval to establish and recruit and/or procure a dedicated SEND Reforms Programme Team to provide the required capacity, capability, leadership, and pace to deliver the programme.
- 6.2 The proposed team will be fully funded through the dedicated SEND Reform Grant and will not place any additional unfunded pressure on the Council's General Fund. The creation of a fixed-term programme structure over the three-year period represents a proportionate and time-limited approach, ensuring robust programme governance, performance management, and assurance arrangements.
- 6.3 Staffing and associated programme costs are expected to remain within the 10% transformation cost threshold, as outlined in Appendix 2. Based on an approved allocation of £2.4 million for 2026/27, alongside indicative allocations of approximately £4.2 million for 2027/28 and £4.8 million for 2028/29, total transformation funding across the programme period is estimated at circa £1.1 million. This will cover staffing and related programme costs.
- 6.4 Expenditure will be monitored through established budget management and financial reporting frameworks to ensure compliance with the approved funding envelope and the principles of the Experts by Experience methodology. The use of fixed-term appointments mitigates the risk of ongoing financial commitments beyond the life of the grant.

Post	GRD	SCP	FY26/27	FY27/28	FY28/29	FY29/30	Total
Programme Manager	SM2_	51	50,528	89,240	91,917	39,448	271,133
Project Manager	GRD8	36	37,549	66,320	68,310	29,316	201,496
Programme Support Officer	GRD5	23	27,288	48,200	49,646	21,306	146,441
Senior Data Analyst	GRD8	36	37,549	66,320	68,310	29,316	201,496
TOTAL			152,915	270,080	278,183	119,387	820,565

- 6.5 An assumed programme start date of September 2026 in Year 1 supports compliance with the 10% transformation cost threshold. While costs across subsequent years remain within this limit, contractual commitments extending beyond 31 March 2029 will require the carry forward of sufficient funding to meet the remaining five months of staffing costs. Based on a review of available guidance for 26/27 and an assumption that the same principles will apply to future years, it is considered permissible to carry forward funding through to FY2029/30 i.e. the start of the new academic year (September 2029), if required.
- 6.6 Where recruitment to fixed-term roles is unsuccessful, interim resources may be procured via the Council's approved REED Managed Services Provider framework or other compliant procurement routes. While the precise cost premium cannot be determined in advance, sufficient headroom exists within confirmed and indicative funding to accommodate this requirement. Although this approach may result in higher short-term costs, it provides the necessary flexibility to maintain delivery timescales and meet

Department for Education and NHS England expectations. All interim arrangements will be subject to appropriate approvals and value-for-money considerations.

- 6.7 Failure to establish sufficient programme capacity may adversely impact delivery of SEND reforms, including meeting key milestones, evidencing improvement, and responding effectively to future Ofsted/CQC inspections. This could present both financial and reputational risks to the Council and its partners.

Vicki Hayes – Senior Accountant

7 **Legal Implications**

- 7.1 Provided the Council follows its Policies there is no legal impediment to this proposal.

Teresa Harrison (Employment Solicitor) Locum.

8. **Procurement Implications**

- 8.1 Procurement If the team is created using council fixed term contracts, then there would be no procurement implications to the employment of those staff. If the Reed MSA is used then this is already set up so there would be minimal procurement implications. If staff are recruited through other agencies then CPU should be approached prior to any further action. Once the team is set up then they would still have to follow and comply with the organisation's governance, such as the CPRs ([Appendix 6.pdf](#), e.g under £10k inc VAT one quote, under £30k inc VAT 3 quotes, then CPU to be engaged), and this could not be delegated with the statement above "To delegate authority for future decisions regarding the delivery of the programme, resources and use of the Prevention Grant to the Executive Director Children and Young People, in consultation with the portfolio holder and the Director of Finance". Although the money may come to us as a grant it then becomes public money and how it is spent is the key factor when considering legislation that applies.

James England – Procurement Manager

9 **Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People**

- 9.1 Yes, See Equality Impact Assessment in Appendix 4. Dedicated resource to deliver the SEND Reform plan will ensure the Council meets delivery expectations and statutory timescales which will have a positive impact on the services provided to support the wellbeing, inclusion and outcomes for children and young people with SEND their families.

Sheila Garara – Assistant Director Children's Services Integration

10 **Key Decision**

- 10.1 Yes

11 **Key Decision Reference**

- 11.1 CYP-04-26

12 **Background Papers**

- 12.1 None

13 Appendices

13.1 Appendix 1 - Every Child Achieving and Thriving

[Every child achieving and thriving \(HTML version\) - GOV.UK](#)

13.2 Appendix 2 - SEND reform: putting children and young people first consultation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/send-reform-putting-children-and-young-people-first>

13.3 Appendix 3 - Experts at Hand & Local Authority SEND Transformation Fund: funding for local authorities 2026 to 2027

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/experts-at-hand-local-authority-send-transformation-fund/experts-at-hand-local-authority-send-transformation-fund-funding-for-local-authorities-2026-to-2027>

13.4 Appendix 4 - Equality Impact Assessment

