

SEND Reform Fund and Programme

Decision Maker: Chief Executive

Service Area: Children's Integration

Directorate: Children and Young People

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Date of Decision: 3rd August 2026

1. Power to make the decision

The decision is being taken under the authorisation contained in Section 9C – Delegations to Specific Officers of Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions) of the Council Constitution for the Chief Executive to take any emergency decisions in respect of the Council's executive functions which cannot be delayed until the next Cabinet meeting.

2. Decision Sought

The delivery of the Oldham SEND Reforms Plan requires sustained, co-ordinated 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.

Decision sought:

- 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 at Hand and Transformation Grant to the Executive Director Children and Young People, in consultation with the portfolio holder and the Director of Finance.

3. Reason for urgency

The SEND Reform plan was submitted to DfE and NHS England on 19 June 2026. The plan outlines key reform activity beginning Q2 2026/27 and sets out the resources that will ensure the local area partnership have the capacity to deliver the first-year plan. Without the recruitment of dedicated programme resource there is a risk that delivery milestones will not be achieved as outlined in the plan and required to be reported to DfE and NHS England on a quarterly basis.

As every Local Authority in England is required to start delivery from Q2, the market for programme management resource will be competitive and any delays to Oldham's recruitment could be impacted by a reduced pool of applicants with the required skills, knowledge and experience to effectively drive and track the delivery of the Reform plan.

4. Risk(s) of not taking the decision

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
- Financial and 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.

5. Financial impact if decision not taken forward

There is a financial risk that grant funding may not be released in Autumn 26/27 if there are delays to the first year delivery of the plan impacting DfE and NHS England's confidence in the local area partnership response to the reforms.

There is a risk that underspend in the Experts at Hand & Local Authority SEND Transformation Fund is clawed back by the DfE.

6. Statutory Officer clearances

a. Section 151 Officer

Name: Lee Walsh

Date 27 July 2026

Comments

This report first seeks approval to accept the £2,397,793 Experts and Hand and Transformation Fund Grant from the Department for Education and secondly, 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.

The proposed team will be fully funded through the dedicated SEND Reform Grant and will not place any additional 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.

Within terms and conditions of the grant, staffing and associated programme costs must be within the 10% transformation cost threshold of the allocated funding. The proposed 3-year grant allocations are, £2.4 million for 2026/27 confirmed and the indicative allocations of approximately £4.2 million for 2027/28 and £4.8 million for 2028/29. The estimated staffing and associated programme costs are £821k, within the estimated total transformation funding of £1.1 million across the life of the allocated grant.

Expenditure will be monitored through established budget management and financial reporting frameworks to ensure compliance with the approved funding requirements. The use of fixed-term appointments mitigates the risk of ongoing financial commitments beyond the life of the grant.

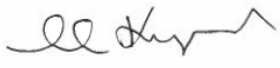
b. Monitoring Officer

Name: Alex Bougatef

Date: 28th July 2026

Comments:

The exercise of emergency powers should be undertaken in consultation with the Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council. However, the Council has not yet appointed a Leader or Deputy Leader for the current municipal year, it is therefore not possible to consult them. In addition, there is no certainty about when a Leader or Deputy Leader will be appointed as the Council has failed at three successive meetings to do so. For the reasons given in the report an urgent decision relating to the report is required and it cannot wait until the appointment of a Leader and Deputy Leader at some undetermined future date.

Approved by the Chief Executive under the authorisation contained in Section 9C – Delegations to Specific Officers of Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions) of the Council Constitution for the Chief Executive to take any emergency decisions in respect of the Council's executive functions.	
Signed:  Shelley Kipling, Chief Executive	Dated: 3 August 2026