

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet held at 2.00 pm on Tuesday, 9 June 2026

Present:

Members: Councillor G Duggins (Chair)
Councillor L Kelly (Deputy Chair)

Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor L Bigham
Councillor R Brown
Councillor P Hetherington
Councillor L Kelly
Councillor AS Khan
Councillor J McNicholas
Councillor M Mutton

Non-Voting Deputy
Cabinet Members: Councillor P Akhtar

Non-Voting Opposition
Members: Councillor F Beechey
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor J Gardiner
Councillor E M Reeves

Other Non-Voting
Councillors: Councillor A Hopkins, Chair of Ethics Committee
Councillor S Jobbar, Chair of the Education and Children's
Services Scrutiny Board (2)
Councillor R Singh (Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination
Committee)

Employees (by Service
Area):

Chief Executive: J Nugent

Children's and Education
Services S Sen (Director), R Sugars

Finance and Resources B Hastie (Director), S Kinsell

Law, Governance and
Safer Communities J Newman (Director), S Bennett

Apologies: Councillors K Caan and G Hayre

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March, 2026 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

3. Approval of the Draft Local Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) Reform Plan Setting out how Coventry Local Area Partnership will deliver the National SEND Reform

Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Children's and Education Services which indicated that, since the reforms introduced in 2014, the national SEND system has been under sustained pressure. This has led to overstretched services and unsustainable financial positions. Despite these challenges, it is recognised that many local area partnerships have shown leadership and innovation, improving local services. The government's commitment is to collaborate and scale what works, investing in inclusive and sustainable systems. Each local area must take full responsibility for robust action plans that demonstrate ownership, ambition, and accountability.

The Local SEND Reform Plan is expected to be revised annually as reforms are rolled out over a 3-year period initially. Delivery occurs within the current statutory framework, and no implementation of policies under consultation or awaiting legislative change is required in this first iteration. The Plan must build on existing foundations and lay the groundwork for reform.

The three key components / expectations of the first iteration of the Reform and Local Plan are:

Inclusive Mainstream System: Most children and young people with SEND should thrive in mainstream settings via high-quality teaching, inclusive practice, and targeted support. Multidisciplinary professional support will be commissioned efficiently at a group level.

Specialist Support: Specialist settings continue to serve those requiring individualised approaches or curricula not available in mainstream education.

Efficient Local Delivery: Investment in health, care, and education will support joined-up, place-based provision. This includes delivery of additional support called Experts at Hand. Collaboration with ICBs will commission multi-disciplinary support across all settings, easing pressure on school transport and ensuring children access education closer to home.

The Department for Education (DfE) will evaluate the submitted Local SEND Reform Plans to monitor ongoing performance throughout the reform period. In instances where acute performance concerns exist, officials will apply heightened scrutiny to ensure all available actions are undertaken for effective implementation of reforms. Throughout the development and implementation of these Plans, continuous support and challenge will be provided by government officials, SEND Advisers, and Financial Advisers. Regular progress updates will be required including the potential to revoke the licence to deliver SEND services in cases of persistent failure.

In line with the national position, Coventry has also seen significant demand increase over the last 10 years. The number of children and young people with Education, Health & Care (EHC) Plans has more than doubled and currently there are over 4,000 children and young people with EHC plans.

Coventry's HNB DSG allocation for the 2026/27 financial year is £81.5M and expenditure is projected to be £90.6M. This projected in-year overspend will be funded from the positive DSG reserve balance (which totalled £16.1M as of 31st March 2025).

Despite now facing financial challenge Coventry is well-placed to deliver on the Reforms as a result of well-established partnership working in place across the local area and work that is already in place, which aligns with the government direction of travel (e.g. continued investment in specialist provision across the city – specialist schools and enhanced resource provision, in the 3rd year of a significant SEND whole city workforce strategy, expanded statutory team supported through core budget resource, and a large SEND Support Service).

To accompany the Reforms the DfE have made funding available in 2026/27 - 2028/29 to the wider system including an Inclusive Mainstream Fund that will be allocated directly to schools to facilitate inclusive provision (on average £19k per primary school and £39k per secondary school). The Local Authority will receive a grant of ca. £3M in 2026/27 rising to an estimated £5.2M (2027/28) and £5.9M (2028/29) to deliver on SEND Reform including Experts at Hand, which is intended to be a new route for mainstream schools to access expert advice from education and health professionals. This allocation also includes up to 20% (£600K in 2026/27) to support transformation and administration. The DfE provides High Needs Capital Funding to local authorities to support the creation of inclusion specialist bases in mainstream settings to increase local capacity, and to consider these as a central part of their local sufficiency planning. The funding is intended to increase capacity across the 0–25 age range and can also be used to expand existing special schools and improve facilities for post-16 learners with SEND.

Allocations are made directly to local authorities using a national formula that takes account of factors such as the number of children and young people in the area, population growth, and existing levels of need. Local authorities are responsible for determining how best to use their allocation in line with their SEND sufficiency strategy and local priorities.

In the 2025/26 financial year, Coventry received an allocation of £5.2M; and in the 2026/27 financial year a further allocation of £5.1M. This funding is planned to be utilised to deliver specialist bases at primary and secondary schools and to

support access and suitability within mainstream schools. The One Strategic Plan for Education sets out the capital strategy, including utilising basic need capital allocations to subsidise the High Needs Capital Allocations to deliver the school SEND sufficiency requirements.

Producing and delivering a co-produced Local Area Partnership Plan is a major requirement and involves considerable additional work. This includes providing updated 3-year pupil number forecasts using revised methodology and aligning this with financial forecasts, as well as designing how we will deliver the Expert at Hand offer. This requirement has been exacerbated by short timescales between receiving the Plan and guidance (9th March) and expected submission of the Plan (19th June), and delays to the operational guidance (e.g. Experts at Hand operational guidance is not expected until after submission of the Plan). The DfE have been very clear that despite the deadline date the Plan is iterative and will continue to change over time.

As a result of short timescales, work will continue on the Plan up to the submission date, and there are some areas of the Plan (particularly forecasts) that have not been included as they are still under development. The Plan, included as Appendix A to the report, sets out vision, goals and the direction of travel. Further updates and information can be provided as required.

The SEND Reform Plan has been developed through co-production and is grounded in an established understanding of Coventry's local SEND system. That understanding has been built over time with children and young people, parents and carers, schools and settings, and partners across education, health and care, and is reflected in the local area's SEND Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF) that is refreshed on an annual basis and our SEND Maturity Assessment (Attached as Appendix B to the report).

In addition, direct co-production activity has informed the development of the Reform Plan itself. Two workshops have been held to date, led by the Council and involving representatives from the Parent Carer Forum (PCF), education settings, the ICB, and Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust. Early drafts of the plan have also been shared electronically with stakeholders, and feedback has been used to strengthen the plan. Feedback from parents and carers has resulted in a stronger emphasis on co-production as a central theme throughout the plan and a greater focus on support for children who are not attending school full time.

The draft Plan will now be considered through wider partnership arrangements, including the Headteachers' Inclusion Group, the Special School Group and the Specialist Base Group. Further focused workshops are also planned to test and strengthen key elements of the plan, including specific reform models such as Experts at Hand. This work will commence before the plan is finalised but will continue afterwards.

Following a request, it was noted that the final version of the Plan that is submitted to the DfE will be shared with Members.

In accordance with Paragraph 11.3 of Part 3E of the Constitution, Councillor R Singh, Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, attended the meeting for

this item of business and agreed the need for urgency such that call-in arrangements will not apply.

The reason for urgency being the timescales involved, as the Local SEND Reform Plan must be submitted to the Department for Education by 19 June 2026.

Officers were congratulated and thanked for all of the work undertaken in this regard.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- 1. Approves the draft Local SEND Reform Plan as attached as Appendix A to the report.**
- 2. Delegates authority to the Director of Children's and Education Services to make amendments to the Plan and submit it ahead of the deadline for submission on the 19th June 2026, following final sign off from the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151 Officer).**

4. Outstanding Issues

There were no outstanding issues.

5. Any Other Items of Urgent Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 2.45pm)