

## Leader of the Council



**Richard Roberts**  
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Sent via email

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Dear Members of Parliament (MPs) of Hertfordshire,

On behalf of children and young people with SEND and their parents and carers - as well as professionals across local government, the NHS and education on the frontline of Hertfordshire's work to improve the support these families receive - we are calling on you to be their voice in Parliament.

Please join us in making the case for systemic, national reform and additional funding ahead of the Autumn Statement and beyond so we can together help children and young people with SEND in our county get the help they need now so they can reach their full potential in the future.

To make this possible locally we feel at the national level there must be:

1. **Funding Reform:** There are several areas of challenging funding in this area:
  - a) High Needs Funding - the money councils receive from Government reserved for the education of children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities / EHCPs (Educational Health and Care Plans) - is unequally distributed based on an outdated formula which is not keeping pace with current need. We have seen a growth of 223% in children requiring this support since 2015. Funding has not increased to match this rising need, leaving Hertfordshire the country's fourth lowest funded council for High Needs and facing a £24m deficit in this budget. **The national funding formula must be revised with the historic funding factor removed in conjunction with an uplift to the entire High Needs Designated Schools Grant to address structural funding deficit in the system.**
  - b) The funding provided to local authorities is not uplifted for NHS pay awards, even though NHS staff are required to support children. If funding is not provided for these pay awards, it results in reductions in staff numbers. The recent 5.5% pay award for NHS staff will result in 5.5% fewer NHS staff working in this area under current funding arrangements.

- c) **Councils must also be given sufficient funding to provide the statutory SEND duties they deliver including the creation and review of EHCPs.** In Hertfordshire, an additional £7 million from wider county council resources has been invested in this area to bridge the gap. The County Council also funds Educational Psychology advice for all statutory assessment, and all statutory SEN transport costs, and again we have not received any additional funding in line to meet the growing need.
- d) NHS services are also facing unprecedented demand on top of the need to address backlogs for children and young people experiencing developmental needs. **National funding must be sufficient to meet need, and ring fenced to invest in children's health services.**
- e) The need for special schools continues, and we are facing an unprecedented level of requests for special school provision. Hertfordshire County Council has an approved capital programme of £137m to support specialist provision across the county, yet there continues to be a shortfall of specialist places for those young people who need them. **A national special school strategy is required, with clear thresholds of need for special and mainstream schooling, alongside appropriate levels of funding, both capital and high needs, to meet these requirements.**
- 2) **Policy reform:** Elements of the SEND statutory framework must be reformed to provide clarity on what is meant by additional needs and how they are to be met in the education system. **Policy related to education, children and young people's services must also be reformed with a recalibration to the principles of inclusion. It is also essential that policy approaches for Children and Young People and in particular those with SEND is coordinated across health, social care and education departments in government.**
- Clearer data** - Across the system, we must record children's needs equally to adults – the current NHS waiting times do not reflect the numbers of children waiting for neurodiversity assessment and treatment as well as other developmental treatment. **We believe they should be reported equivalently to waiting times for operations in hospitals to boost action and accountability.**
- 3) **Enabling inclusion:** It is hard to see how improvements will be made without a mainstream education system with inclusivity at its core. In Hertfordshire we continue to push for change so that schools are both funded and incentivised to educate children in mainstream settings including those with SEND where it is in a child's best interests, supported by a concerted focus on workforce capacity and training. **There is a need to consider how accountability measures and the inspection framework can support and recognise inclusion in mainstream schools, in order to provide positive and appropriate outcomes for all children and young people, including those with SEND.**
- 4) **National Workforce Strategy:** A lack of funding and increasing need is compounded by the significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of a range of professional areas including Therapists, Paediatricians and Educational

Psychologists. In each of these fields there simply aren't enough in the country, nor a sufficient workforce strategy to recruit and train new practitioners and fulfil their statutory duties for children and young people with SEND. Whilst significant effort has gone into local recruitment and retention strategies, with some success, local area partnerships alone cannot resolve this challenge without a national rethink of training, policy and investment. **A cross-government, multi-disciplinary workforce strategy must be developed to recruit and retain more Education Psychologists, Therapists, Paediatricians and school staff with associated funding to support those who wish to join these professions.**

We welcomed the Westminster Hall Debate of 4<sup>th</sup> September 2024 which discussed SEND Provision across Hertfordshire, highlighting the challenges that some families face, and the innovation we are employing locally to address those challenges. The latest Westminster Hall debate on SEND provision in the East of England this week further highlights the importance of this topic, and the widespread impact it has on children, young people, their families and local services in our region and across the country.

We share this focus. Following the SEND Local Area Inspection in July 2023, and the publication of the [SEND Priority Action & Improvement Plan](#) in January 2024, the Hertfordshire Local Area Partnership – led by Hertfordshire County Council and local NHS partners- has been working at pace to deliver improvements that will lead to better experiences for children, young people and families with SEND. Examples include:

1. Our **'Making SEND Everyone's Business'** Programme, which has led to the recruitment of over 130 new staff, with transferrable skills and real lived experience of SEND, to increase capacity in statutory SEND services who manage Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). This has been funded by an additional £7 million of annual investment by the Local Authority. This is supported by a new delivery model, and a nationally recognised SEND Academy to train staff and a dedicated SEND Quality Assurance Team to improve the quality of EHCPs. [HR Magazine - How Hertfordshire Council revolutionised its recruitment](#)
2. We have improved the **timeliness of new EHCPs** being issued within 20-week timescale to 57% (year to date Aug 24), an improvement of almost 18% on last year and now above national average (50.3% in 2023). We strive to further improve in this area.
3. Health have worked in partnership with education and parent carers to transform the **Integrated Therapy Service** has supported a 68% reduction in the numbers of children waiting more than six weeks for speech and language EHCP reports (Sep 2023 to July 2024).
4. Our **Special School Place Planning Strategy**, supported by £137m in capital funding, has led to 764 additional places being created since 2018, with a further 255 places created in Specialist Resource Provisions (SRP). Some recent successes include the rebuild of the [Valley School in Stevenage](#) and the

opening of an [SRP at Bushey Meads School](#).

5. The development of the **Neurodiversity Support Hub** has provided a single point of access to information, guidance and signposting for parent carers in relation to Autism and ADHD, with no requirement for a child to have a diagnosis to receive support.

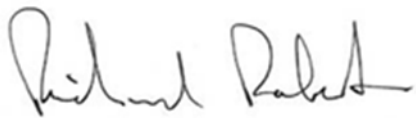
By delivering millions of pounds of additional investment and radically transforming the way in which we work, bringing in more staff with lived experience of SEND we aim to truly transform young people and families' experiences. However, our SEND services, like those delivered by local areas up and down the country, continue to face a perfect storm of underfunding, increasing need, and workforce challenges, understandably leading to delays and dissatisfaction.

The independent report by the ISOS partnership, commissioned by the County Councils Network and Local Government Association "Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England"<sup>1</sup> laid bare a number of the challenges felt by young people, families, education settings and local services across England, and concluded that "the SEND system is broken".

The ISOS report highlights that stakeholders across the system feel that "fundamental and far-reaching reform is becoming inevitable – and indeed unavoidable". We and other local areas will continue to work within the current system to do all we can to improve, but we feel without the necessary national reform, examples of which we have highlighted above, true sustained improvement will not be achievable.

We welcome continuing discussions with you and a focus on this issue within central government. Everyone working so hard in this system wants the best for the children and young people of this country, and it is vitally important that we work together to secure a better future, and better outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Kind Regards,



**Richard Roberts**  
Leader of Hertfordshire County  
Council



**Elliot Howard-Jones**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust



**Alan Gray**  
Chair of Hertfordshire Schools Forum

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<sup>1</sup> [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND \(squarespace.com\)](#)