

Appendix 3 Consultation Summary:

Introduction:

The draft SEND Strategy 2026-2029 has been coproduced with children and young people, parent carers, practitioners, schools, settings and wider partners across the SEND system. Through a comprehensive programme of engagement across Summer 2025, we heard from over 1,000 voices, whose lived experiences and professional insights directly shaped the development of the strategy. The strong themes that emerged through this activity informed the creation of the Strategy's six ambitions, ensuring they are grounded in local experience, clearly linked to what children, young peoples, families and schools told us, and focused on the areas where improvement is most needed. Because we collected so much meaningful feedback during the pre-engagement phase, the number of formal consultation responses was naturally lower, but has still provided valuable confirmation and challenge to ensure the Strategy accurately reflects priorities.

Aim:

The aim of the 12 week public consultation (14th November 2025 – 6th February 2026) was to provide the opportunity for people to tell us whether the strategy accurately reflects their priorities through the six ambitions, whether there was anything that was unclear, missing or in need of strengthening and what people feel is the most important priority for the SEND Local Area to partnership that would have the biggest impact on children and young people in Hertfordshire.

Methodology:

The draft SEND Strategy was published on the Local Offer and Hertfordshire County Council website, with details of the ways that people could give their views and contribute to the consultation. An easy read version of the SEND Strategy was also made available.

Method:	Responses/Attendees:
Survey	128 total responses (56 Parent Carer; 2 VCS representatives; 43 education professionals working in school or settings; 13 SEND Workforce and 14 other (School Governor; SEND Crisis; MHLN Health and Care Partnership etc))
Online parent carer focus groups	13 parent carers and professionals across 2 sessions
Online SEND feedback group workshop	7 SENCOs/Headteachers
Conversations at DSPL Coffee Mornings	10 families and professionals
Expert by Experience focus group	8 young people, attending 2 workshops
SfYP Youth Councils	50+ young people across 6 sessions
Survey for young people	5 responses

How the consultation has contributed to the development of the final SEND Strategy:

Key Theme/finding from the consultation	How this has been considered in the SEND Strategy
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From all activity:	
There was broad agreement across all consultation activities that the Partnership has identified the right priorities within its six ambitions, reflecting what matters most to children and young people with SEND and their families. The survey asked ‘Do the six ambitions reflect what matters most to children and young people with SEND and their families?’ 56.4% responded ‘Yes’, 34.1% ‘Partly’ and 9.5% ‘No’. Analysis of ‘Partly’ responses identified that there was agreement around priorities but wanted to know how ambitions would be achieved.	The six ambitions of the SEND Strategy remain unchanged from the draft.
Across all the consultation activity, a common and most prominent theme was asking how we would deliver this strategy. Analysis of survey showed that where respondents answered ‘Partly’ or ‘No’, a number of comments stated they wanted to understand how we would deliver the ambitions of the strategy. This was also heard strongly through focus groups with families and SENCOs.	A summary of the partnership’s improvement plan, to ensure it is accessible to families, will be published alongside the SEND Strategy. This includes the key actions to be delivered over the next 12 months and the impact milestones that will be measured. The partnership will evaluate the impact of the strategy and plan after 12 months and bring a report to Cabinet Panel.
Listening to lived experience and the expertise of parent carers and children and young people should be central. This came through from all activity, but very strongly from our engagement with children and young people. They wanted us to know that they are the experts of their own experience and therefore should be included in decisions that are made about them.	This has confirmed that the work we are already doing and plan to do is right as ‘Ambition 1 – Listen, Engage, Collaborate, Evolve’ places a focus on strengthening our approach to how we engage with families to create more opportunities for ongoing and meaningful dialogue and increasing the diversity of voices that we hear from.

From activity with children and young people:	
Young People fed back that early help is valued but long waits for assessments and mental health support reduce trust. They also fed back that more training is needed to support staff in identifying needs.	The Partnership has recognised this as a priority through ‘Ambition 2 – Early Identification & Support’ which focuses on these areas. The Partnership will continue to work on training staff and developing services to that needs are spotted earlier and that support is available regardless of a diagnosis. Improvements to access and equity of both physical and mental health services is a commitment within this ambition of the strategy. This is reference in our action plan summary.
Young people fed back that many find mainstream classrooms difficult and want there to be a more consistent offer of SEND support across schools and more provisions for those that need it.	The Partnership includes schools and settings, and Ambition 3 – Local Provision for Children & Young People speaks directly to the need for stronger classroom support, more suitable provision and better inclusion in mainstream. This will be outlined in the draft SEND Provision Plan.
Young people fed back that bullying and emotional safety are major concerns that require stronger, more visible action.	The Partnership recognises the importance of inclusion through ‘Ambition 4 – Aspirational for All’. This aims to create one vision of inclusion across Hertfordshire schools, settings, workforce, children, young people and families. This will involve developing a partnership wide collaborative approach to inclusion that supports inclusive cultures in settings and between pupils, as referenced in our action plan summary.
Young people told us that transitions can be very stressful, especially as they reach the end of school or move over to adult services, and they would like more support in navigating this.	The Partnership understands the importance of support at transitions, with ‘Ambition 5 – Preparing for the Future’ setting out how the Partnership will strengthen transitions at every stage, ensuring they are well-planned, consistent and centred on the young person’s goals. This includes the transition to adult services and the pathways into employment, education and training post-16 as referenced in our action plan summary.
Young people told us that they would like clearer and more accessible information with less jargon to help them find the right help and support.	The Partnership recognises this as a priority as highlighted in ‘Ambition 2 – Early Identification and Support’ which commits to making information clearer, easier to find and accessible so that families and young people can find support without jargon and confusion. The Strategy also emphasises improving communication across the partnership through the ACT (accurate,

	compassionate, timely) approach , ensuring information is clearer and more consistent.
Cross-cutting themes from engagement with parent carers, schools and settings, voluntary and community organisations, the SEND workforce and wider stakeholders	
They want to see a plan for specialist places and for there to be places available for children in between mainstream and special. The current system of provision is insufficiently flexible for the range of needs children have and for children with less familiar needs.	Developing a range of provisions, or ‘graduated offer’ is a top priority for the Partnership and plans for this are detailed in our draft SEND Provision Plan. Ambition 3 – Local Provision for Children and Young People – states that we aim to <i>“move away from a ‘mainstream vs. specialist’ model and instead building a more flexible system that offers a range of support based on individual needs.”</i>
Inclusion should be a shared responsibility There is lack of clarity in the SEND Strategy about what we mean by inclusion in practice	The Partnership recognises this as a priority through two ambitions. ‘Ambition 4 – Aspirational for All’ aims to create one vision of inclusion across Hertfordshire schools, settings, workforce, children, young people and families. This will involve developing a partnership wide collaborative approach to inclusion. Ambition 3 – Local Provision for Children & Young People highlights the Ordinarily Available Provision Guide already created for schools which provides practical support on creating inclusive environments in practice. Now the guide has launched, the partnership will continue to support schools to use this guide and measure its impact.
Challenges with workforce were highlighted, including the need for more support for SENCOs and Schools. The Partnership still needs to focus on improving communications. We know that challenges with staff workloads, responding to increasing needs and	This is a priority for the Partnership as highlighted in ‘Ambition 6 – Strong Foundations’ which includes supporting our workforce across the Partnership, including SENCOs and schools, <i>via</i> expanding our SEND Academy and delivering training through HFL Education and health services, with a focus on accurate, compassionate and timely communication.

staff turnover impact the timeliness and quality of communications.	Additional investment by the Council into statutory SEND services to recruit more staff will also support delivery of this ambition by reducing workloads allowing for more focus on good communication.
We also heard feedback on issues that sit outside the direct scope of the SEND Local Area Partnership, where responsibility lies with national government. While these areas are not within our direct control, we will continue to raise them with local MPs and work with wider system partners. This feedback included calls for more inclusive and accessible communities, as well as changes to the national curriculum.	