

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL –

PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Beverely Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education
& Skills

DECISION NUMBER:

26/00043

Executive Decision – key**26/00043 - Expert at Hands (EaH) and Local Authority (LA) Special Education Needs & Disability (SEND) Transformation Grant**

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Education and Skills I agree to:

- a) Accept the Expert at Hands (EaH) and Local Authority (LA) Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) Transformation Grant from the Department for Education for 2026 to 2029; and the deployment of the grant funding in accordance with the grant terms & conditions including the development and implementation of an Expert at Hands Offer and actions to support the design, review and implementation of wider SEN reform activity; .
- b) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education to take all necessary actions to administer and deploy the grant funding, develop and implement the Expert at Hands offer, and deliver associated SEND reform activity in accordance with the grant terms and conditions; and
- c) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education to take relevant actions including but not limited to, negotiating, finalising the terms of and entering into relevant contracts, contract variations and other legal agreements as required, to implement the decision.

Reasons for decision:

- In February 2026, the Government published its White Paper: Every Child Achieving and Thriving and accompanying SEN reform Consultation: Putting Children & Young People First, which included the commitment to invest £1.8 billion nationally over next three years to develop the Expert at Hands (EaH) Offer along with a further £0.2 billion to support Local Authorities to deliver future national SEN reforms.

- In mid-April, the Department of Education announced the 2026-27 individual LA allocations for the EaH and LA SEND Transformation Fund, along with indicative national allocations for 2027-28 and 2028-29. For Kent County Council this equated to £12.2 million in 2026-27, and approximately £21.2 million and £24.0 million respectively for the next 2 years.
- On 5 June 2026, more detailed guidance was issued on the expected use of the funding and updated terms and conditions.
- Local Authorities (LAs) are expected to work in partnership with Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and wider system partners to develop and deliver a new EaH offer for mainstream education settings which provides a new route to access expert advice and support from education & health professionals including:
 - Educational psychology services & specialist teachers/support
 - Additional outreach from alternative provision, special schools & post 16 institutions
 - Speech & Language therapists and Occupational therapists
 - A new Speech & Language Therapist Advanced Practitioner in every ICB area
- Local areas (including LA, ICB, Mainstream settings, Parents & voice of children & young people) are responsible for defining the exact offer and distribution of resources, according to local circumstances within national expectations as set out within the guidance.
- The delivery and administration of the services funded from the grant are expected to be through both the LA and system partners (including health).
- The grant will also fund associated administration costs of EaH offer and wider SEN reforms including evaluating existing SEND support services to mainstream schools and developing, submitting and implementing future SEND reforms.
- This decision is required to accept the funding for the 3-year programme providing the terms and conditions remain similar, and deploy the grant funding in accordance with the grant conditions and future DfE guidance.

The decision approves acceptance and deployment of the grant funding for the purposes prescribed by the grant conditions, including delivery of the Expert at Hands Offer and SEND reform activity. Any future strategies, policies or substantive service changes arising from wider SEND reform activity, that require a Key Decision, will be subject to separate decision-making processes.

Financial implications:

- The DfE have announced the 2026-27 funding allocation for the Expert at Hands and LA SEND Transformation Fund for Kent County Council is £12,155,170. Indicative allocations for 2027-28 and 2028-29 have been estimated from national totals as £21,200,000 and £24,027,000 respectively.

- This is a ring-fenced revenue grant and the total cost of delivery is expected to be met from the grant. There is no expectation of a General Fund contribution towards the additional delivery expectations set out in the grant. The service will be designed to be affordable within the grant funding available. Related services are currently funded by the Council from its Dedicated Schools Grant allocation (Education ring-fenced grant) or in the case of services commissioned directly by the ICB: the grant conditions stipulate that it should be used to build on and enhance existing local capacity & good practice. It is not intended to be used to substitute existing spend.
- For 2026-27 allocation, funds are permitted to be carried forward past March 2027 for the purposes outlined in the terms and conditions (of that year of funding) but must be used by September 2027. Terms and conditions for future years of funding are still to be published. Funding Post 2029 has yet to be confirmed but the DfE have set its long term intention that LAs will continue to be responsible for commissioning the EaH offer in future through the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.
- Failure to comply with the terms & conditions may result in the Secretary of State recover some or all of the grant that has been allocated.
- Future support for high needs related Dedicated Schools Grant deficits that arise in 2026-27 and 2027-28 will take into account local authorities' appropriate use of this grants to establish an effective and quality Expert at Hands offer. The Plan to implement the Expert at Hands offer will also be an influencing factor in the DfE agreeing to pay the High Needs Stability Grant in 2026-27 which will fund 90% of the Council's Dedicated School Grant accumulated deficit as at March 2026 (estimated grant total of £290 million).

Legal implications:

- The Experts at Hand & Local Authority special educational needs and disability (SEND) Transformation grant will be paid by the Secretary of State for Education as a grant to local authorities under section 14 of the Education Act 2002.
- The purpose and permitted use of the funding is set out in the background section.
- Failure to comply with the terms & conditions of this grant are set out in the financial implications section.
- Whilst the Local Authority is the recipient and coordinator of the grant, it is expected the Local Authority will work with the local area partnership to commission and provide services funded from this grant. Where delivery or commissioning is undertaken by a third party, for example: the ICB or with schools, the appropriate legal agreement will be put in place including Section 75 agreement, service level agreement or contract.

Equalities implications:

- An Initial Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been completed. With no immediate issues raised at this time but will be kept under review as plans are developed.

Data Protection implications:

- A DPIA will be completed where required in response to further planning.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee considered this decision on 14 July 2026.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

- The option to not accept the funding has been considered. This was disregarded at an early stage. The Expert at Hands Offer is a nationally prescribed offer. If the Local Authority did not accept the model, education settings would not have the opportunity to access additional professional advice, and the children and young people of Kent would not have an equitable offer of support compared to the rest of the country. Unless, the Council chose to invest its own funding in an equivalent service (at a significant cost to the Council Tax Payer). It would also put at risk current and future support from Government to help fund the current and future Dedicated School Grant overspend.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

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Signed

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Date