

People and Communities Select Committee

Date: **14 July 2023**

Time: **10am**

Venue: **Council Chamber, County Hall, Norwich**

SUPPLEMENTARY A g e n d a

Advice for members of the public:

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10. Schools' capital programmes

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Report by the Executive Director of Children's Services

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People and Communities Select Committee

Item No: 10

Report Title: Schools' capital programmes

Date of Meeting: 14 July 2023

Responsible Cabinet Member: Cllr Carpenter (Cabinet Member for Children's Services)

Responsible Director: Sara Tough, Executive Director of Children's Services

Executive Summary

This report sets out the schools' capital programmes for mainstream and specialist places across Norfolk. The mainstream programme addresses largely new places required as a result of housing development, and the condition of the remaining Norfolk County Council schools' estate. The SEND capital investment was originally agreed by Policy and Resources Committee in Autumn 2018 and subsequently included within the NCC's capital programme. This was agreed due to the compelling business case that we needed to develop more state-funded specialist provision – special schools and specialist resource bases – to meet current and future need for children and young people with SEND as well as address the historic over-reliance independent sector provision.

Recommendations / Action Required

The Select Committee is asked to:

1. Receive the report on the proposed schools' capital programmes for mainstream and SEND investment prior to the presentation to Cabinet, including:
 - understanding the proposed SEND programme of capital investment in the context of the DFE 'safety valve' in support of the Local First Inclusion Strategy
 - noting the individual projects set out at Annex A.
2. Consider the revised draft Terms of Reference for Capital Priorities Group at Annex B and agree proposed plan for future oversight of the development of the schools' capital programmes

1. Background and Purpose

- 1.1 The County Council has a duty to secure sufficient pupil places to meet the demands of the school-age population. For a number of years, the main financial source to support this duty is the annual schools' capital grant funding from the Government. This grant, along with funding from other sources, is used to support the Council's strategic plans for the provision of additional places and for improving the quality of existing NCC-maintained school buildings.
- 1.2 This report presents the proposed refresh of the schools' capital programmes for mainstream and Special Educational Needs which will be presented to Cabinet later in the Summer. The former is driven largely by housing development, providing schools in new communities as long-term infrastructure and where there is increased demographic need. The medium and long term forecasts and focus of investment are articulated annually each January in the Schools' Local Growth and Investment Plan. The SEND programme is based on the sufficiency analysis, which this year formed part of the Safety Valve Agreement between NCC and the Department for Education.
- 1.3 The structure of this report is as follows:
- A summary of existing schools' capital funding sources
 - Governance of the schools' capital programme
 - A summary of progress against the programme approved by NCC Cabinet in May 2022.
 - A schedule of schemes in the approved programme for 2023-2026+

2. Proposal

Capital funding sources

- 2.1 The external capital funding sources for the schools' capital programme of investment are set out in the table below:

£m	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Basic Need	15.938m	2.716m	0.026m
LA Capital Maintenance	4.883m	-	-
High Needs provision capital allocation (HNPCA)	10.364m	-	-

- 2.2 CIL income for schools' infrastructure is currently allocated for 2020-2022 at a rate of £2m and this has now increased for 2023/24 at a rate of £2.5m. This provides a total income of £9m since 2017/18 for those completed projects in

the Greater Norwich Growth Area. Section 106 income is available in those areas where CIL is not utilised and previous Agreements continue to provide some income.

- 2.3 The Greater Norwich Growth Board (GNGB) has agreed that the £2.5m allocation can be utilised to underwrite the cost of NCC borrowing to deliver schemes in the three district areas and propose for 2023/24 a proportion of both Wymondham and Hethersett secondary schemes are funded in this way.
- 2.4 Due to the move towards CIL, Norfolk County Council approved the underwriting of the schools' mainstream capital programme from borrowing up to £30m. However to date, the external grant has been able to sustain the investment.
- 2.5 There has been considerable fluctuation in the construction industry for approximately two years, and along with the increased focus on carbon reduction this has put pressure on the cost basis for the programmes.
- 2.6 Three priorities have been set for the capital programme in recent years and these remain largely unchanged:
 - A - Growth – developing the capacity of the estate to meet pupil number growth
 - B - Implementing specialist, targeted and improvement strategies
 - C – Improving the condition and efficiency of the NCC-maintained school estate*.

Governance of Children's Services schools' capital programme

- 2.7 Children's Services' Capital Priorities Group (CPG) considers emerging business cases for investment and makes a recommendation to the Executive Director of Children's Services as delegated decision maker on schemes for inclusion into the programme and subsequent budget adjustments.
- 2.8 CPG is a confidential group scrutinises¹ the progress of the capital programmes' delivery to meet the statutory duty for pupil places. Membership includes political groups within the Council in addition to headteacher group and school governor representation. The confidential nature is in response to commercially sensitive information shared.
- 2.9 A revised draft terms of reference for the Group is attached at Annexe B. It is proposed that this Group brings an annual report to People and Communities Select Committee prior to the presentation of the capital programmes to Cabinet.

* NCC has no responsibility for maintaining the estate held by academy trusts. Funding for this purpose is distributed separately by the DFE via condition allocations and a separate programme of investment

Progress on previously agreed programmes

2.10 Completions in the last financial year include:

- Expansion of Ormiston Victory and Sprowston Academies providing additional secondary places in response to demographic and housing growth
- Gayton Primary Academy relocation and expansion to 210 places
- Small expansions at Churchill Park and Parkside schools
- Scheme to expand places at John Grant School in Caister, where a grant was agreed for the school to deliver a scheme
- The Bridge, Easton new special school delivered in partnership with the DFE Free School Programme. Land secured by NCC with provision of access road and services
- Replacement modular classrooms at Holly Meadows and Beeston St Mary Primary Schools as condition projects
- Remodelling and refurbishment at Falcon Junior School, Sprowston following flooding.

2.11 The scheme currently on site is the construction of a new primary school for Cringleford village. This school will be opened by Inspiration Trust. Imminently to follow are a new primary school for the Silfield new development, and a relocation and expansion of Blofield Primary School. The latter two are pending planning determination.

A. Mainstream proposals

2.12 Demographic pressure in the secondary sector is working its way through high schools across the County, and based on school forecast data there are some areas which will continue to experience this pressure on places for the next three years. These areas remain the focus of the investment contained in the mainstream programme.

2.13 There are a number of areas where Year 7 admissions for September 2023, despite the forecast information and planned investment, there has been oversubscription of school places in high schools. The areas of particular demand have been in Hethersett and Downham Market. All children have been offered a school place, but the aim to provide children with a place in their local school has been more challenging than in previous years where secondary school population has been smaller.

2.14 Norfolk now has approximately 95% of its secondary school population in academy schools, and as a result, it is essential the Council works closely with partners in the education sector to ensure the statutory duty is met.

- 2.15 There continue to be a number of new primary schools in the mainstream programme, as housing developments come forward through the Districts' Local Plans. These are largely delivered on sites secured through Section 106 Agreements. At present, the majority of largescale house building has slowed due to challenges including the need for developers to meet Nutrient Neutrality for residential properties.
- 2.16 The majority of Norfolk's housing growth is located in the Greater Norwich Growth Area, overseen by the joint Board arrangements for South Norfolk, Norwich and Broadland. The developments in the Greater Norwich area include plans for continued housing in North East Norwich, Wymondham and Hethersett, and planned housing in Long Stratton.
- 2.17 Other large scale developments are Strategic Urban Extensions in Attleborough and Thetford, along with major developments in Bradwell and Caister, West Winch, Kings Hill and others across the Districts.
- 2.18 A summary of proposed schemes for the next three years is set out below but will be subject to fluctuation of housing development. Budgets are established at the outset of a project development, but not fully committed from funds until there is greater certainty for delivery and need.

Project	Anticipated year construction commencement
Hethersett High Academy (expansion)	2023
Wymondham High Academy (expansion)	2024
King's Lynn Academy (expansion)	2024
Primary in Bradwell (new school)	2025
Downham Market Academy expansion	2025
Attleborough High expansion	2025+
Holt Primary (relocation and expansion)	2026
Primary in Thetford (new school)	2026
Primary in Attleborough (first new school)	2026+
Primary in Poringland (new school)	2026+
North Norwich/Rackheath High School (new school)	2026+

B. SEND/Local First Inclusion proposals

- 2.19 The ambition to increase specialist places for children and young people in special schools and Specialist Resource Bases was originally set out in 2018 to Policy and Resources Committee with an allocation of £120m of NCC funding to support an ambitious programme.
- 2.20 The Local First Inclusion Strategy is all about improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND ensuring, wherever possible and appropriate,

they can attend school close to their home/in their community with the support they need to make progress in their learning alongside other children of the same age. A wider report on the Strategy was presented to Cabinet in May 2023 and Scrutiny Committee in June 2023.

- 2.21 Local First Inclusion is a six-year programme which has been agreed by the Secretary of State, as part of the DfE 'safety valve' programme, securing DfE securing DfE investment of £70m alongside NCC investment of c. £35m. This investment is aimed at ensuring we can collectively improve assessment, support, services and provision for children and young people with SEND whilst also achieving a balanced High Needs Block budget over the medium to longer term.
- 2.22 The original target number of additional places has been met, but the continued upward pattern of demand for places has led to the second phase of investment set out in Local First Inclusion Strategy (a detailed summary of progress across the wider strategy is set out in an Annex C).
- 2.23 Contained in the capital element of this Programme are two new school proposals, increase of places in three existing special schools and delivery of specialist places alongside mainstream on primary and secondary school sites. The latter is largely via the Specialist Resource Base (SRB) programme where there is a focus on utilising latent capacity in some primary schools where pupil numbers are experiencing some decline.
- 2.24 Expansion of one of the existing special schools entails the relocation and expansion of Fred Nicholson School to a new site in Swaffham. The land negotiation is complete (approved by NCC Cabinet earlier in 2023) and the acquisition will complete once planning is achieved. The planning application is anticipated in the early Summer 2023, following on from pre-planning exhibitions held in the first week of June at the current school and at Swaffham Assembly Hall.
- 2.25 As part of this investment there is a proposed extension of Sheringham Woodfields School. This includes a land acquisition of an adjacent field. Negotiations have been underway but due to the challenges of identifying a value of the land, it is now recommended to proceed with Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) under section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to secure the land.
- 2.26 The third existing special school scheduled for expansion is Sidestrand Hall School, which has been included in the DfE School Rebuild Programme, and NCC has secured the agreement to include 30 additional places as part of the project, funded by NCC capital.
- 2.26 Schemes for new primary SRBs are in development at Watton Junior School and Greyfriars, King's Lynn, in addition to the expansion of Sprowston infant SRB. Slightly earlier in the process are plans for Acle Academy and Alderman

Peel, Wells for new ASD Secondary SRBs. These are in addition to plans for primary SRBs and secondary units yet to be defined as part of the proposal submitted to the DFE in 2022. The identification of sites for the primary SRBs is well underway and moving into a feasibility stage for a number across the County.

- 2.27 A summary of all schemes in the programme is set out in the table below. These projects have associated revenue savings implications, so the normal budget development process has been amended with all available budget fully committed based on most accurate information at the time.

Project	Anticipated year construction commencement	Number of places
Swaffham new school (relocation and expansion of Fred Nicholson School)	2024	224 (mix of reprovided and new)
4 th new special school Gt Yarmouth	2025	170
5 th new special School ASD West Norfolk	2025	100
Sheringham Woodfields expansion	2025	40 (new)
Sidestrand Hall expansion (contribution to DFE scheme)	TBC	30 (new)
Watton Junior SEMH SRB	2023	16
Greyfriars, KL SEMH SRB	2024	16
Acle Academy ASD SRB	2024	25
Alderman Peel ASD SRB	2024	25
New primary SRBs (sites currently under assessment)	TBC	360
New secondary units – delivery model in discussion with secondary	TBC	180

C. Condition proposals

- 2.28 The main priority for the investment of capital maintenance in the remaining schools' estate is essential urgent works to ensure schools are able to remain open (including Health and Safety).

- 2.29 A further priority is to reduce the carbon footprint of the school buildings by investment in the building fabric. This includes match funding programmes of LED replacement lighting as well as replacement of inefficient doors and windows. These capital maintenance schemes have the additional benefit of reducing energy bills for schools and recognises this ensures that the savings will be spent on teaching and learning.

3. Impact of the Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal for mainstream will ensure our statutory duty is met with regard to provision of local places.
- 3.2 The proposal for SEND/Local First Inclusion will meet the terms of the Safety Valve Agreement between NCC and DFE.

4. Evidence and Reasons for Decision

- 4.1 The 'Norfolk multiplier' for new homes is 28.1 primary age children per 100 homes (4 per year group) and 14.5 secondary age children per 100 homes (3 per year group). This is an average, with some parts of the County producing higher numbers and other parts lower. New developments can produce new patterns of place demand, and therefore an average can allow for variation.

Development size	New primary places	New secondary places
500	140	73
800	225	116
1000	281	145
1500	422	218

- 4.2 Contributions for education infrastructure have increased in the recently approved Planning Obligations Standards. The changes are listed below, the costs are attributed on a cost per place basis, indicating the increase of delivery of projects recently accounted for and inclusion of Biodiversity net gain and carbon reduction requirements.

School Phase	Pre 2023 cost per place	Current cost per place
Early Education (2-4)	£14,022	£22,200
Primary (4-11)	£14,022	£22,200
High School (11-16)	£15,664	£26,900
Sixth Form (16-18)	£15,664	£26,900

- 4.3 To account for the level of SEND need a cost per place has been introduced for SEND pupils, this has been set at £74,920. This will represent a proportion of the total pupil population from any development and the funds will be used to support SEND demand as maybe required.
- 4.4 Refreshed SEND sufficiency data analysis, being based on population data and historical patterns, sets out the expected picture of demand in the EHCP system without any shift in the strategic direction of SEND. The Local First Inclusion strategy sets out a significantly different picture of placements of children and young people, with the plan focussed on a substantial reduction of children and young people in the independent sector.

5. Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Local Authority statutory duty is to provide sufficient places.
- 5.2 It is possible to plan for fewer additional places, where surplus places are available further afield, but within maximum recommended travel distances.
- 5.3 Norfolk County Council would then have a duty to provide Home to School Transport. This would add a considerable inconvenience to children and families and is outside of the Council's policies (e.g. building local communities). It would also add to the existing transport costs, where budget pressures already exist and market difficulties already exist to meet current demand.
- 5.4 Provision of fewer specialist places would result in the High Needs Block recovery plan and, therefore, the Safety Valve agreement, not being achieved.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Funding of the mainstream programme will be a combination of Basic Need grant, S106 collected where available and NCC borrowing to an agreed limited of £30m, with borrowing costs for schemes within the Greater Norwich area applicable to be paid from CIL income.
- 6.2 Changes have been approved to the Planning Obligation Standards which outlines the developer contributions expected for Education provision. Values have been increased for those S106 areas of County which will generate additional income for all phases of education sector and an additional element to account for the SEND need. These additional sums will be used to support future capital priorities as may be required from future developments. These costs are reviewed annually to ensure they maintain pace with inflationary and other factors.
- 6.3 The funding envelope for SEND/Local first Inclusion will be a combination of NCC borrowing (£120M), High Needs Priority Capital Allocation (HNPCA) and if approved, DFE capital funding for two new special schools.
- 6.4 Although there is currently a borrowing envelope of £30m in place for mainstream schools' capital, to date this has not been called upon. Officers will continue to minimise the borrowing required through effective use of other funding sources available (thus minimising the revenue implications of the programme to the Council).

7. Resource Implications

7.1 Staff:

There is no direct implication for delivery of the capital programme itself, but that there are other staffing implications in relation to utilisation of the assets through the LFI programme?

7.2 Property:

A number of the new school schemes will mean an additional asset for Norfolk County Council. However, any academy will be subject to the standard 125 year lease arrangement between NCC and the incoming Academy Trust. There are no additional requirements for office space.

7.3 IT: There are no changes to the requirements for IT.

8. Other Implications

8.1 Legal Implications: none identified

8.2 Human Rights Implications: none identified

8.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) (this must be included): New school places are planned to ensure that provision has no adverse impact on young people including those with disabilities, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnerships, pregnancy/maternity, race, religious belief, sex or sexual orientation where appropriate. The agreed policy aims to secure a good place of education for every child. In particular it seeks to ensure that every school has sufficient capacity for strong leadership and governance to safeguard a good education for all.

8.4 Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA): none identified

8.5 Health and Safety implications (where appropriate): none identified

8.6 Sustainability implications (where appropriate):

8.6.1 Large scale housing developments require associated infrastructure, including school places to create sustainable communities. Provision of local school places will ensure the need for travel and Home to School Transport is minimised.

8.6.2 NCC has a target to carbon net zero by 2030 and this has implications for all new building design with all new school aiming to be as close as possible carbon zero in use. DFE output specification which drives the national design of schools has set a similar target for 2025. The capital maintenance allocation gives high priority reduction in carbon footprint of the existing school estate.

8.7 Any Other Implications: none identified

9. Risk Implications / Assessment

9.1 The school's capital programme have a Risk Register that is reviewed at least annually. The main risks identified currently are set out below and are monitored by Children's Services Capital Priorities Group which oversees the schools' capital programme:

- a. Construction supply chain shortages/unpredictable levels of construction inflation
- b. Delays to individual planning applications
- c. Land assembly for new school schemes.

9.2 Delivery of places within the Safety Valve Agreement between NCC and the Department for Education is a wider risk but will be carefully monitored and mitigated with the governance arrangements.

10. Recommendations

The Select Committee is asked to:

1. Receive the report on the proposed schools' capital programmes for mainstream and SEND investment prior to the presentation to Cabinet, including:
 - understanding the proposed SEND programme of capital investment in the context of the DFE 'safety valve' in support of the Local First Inclusion Strategy
 - noting the individual projects set out at Annex A.
2. Consider the revised draft Terms of Reference for Capital Priorities Group at Annex B and agree proposed plan for future oversight of the development of the schools' capital programmes

11. Background Papers

11.1 Local First Inclusion, NCC Scrutiny Committee, May 2023

11.2 Local First Inclusion Update, NCC Cabinet, May 2023

11.3 Schools' Local Growth and Investment Plan, NCC Cabinet January 2023

11.4 Schools' capital programme, NCC Cabinet, June 2022

11.5 Transforming the System for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Norfolk, Policy and Resources Committee, October 2018

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained within this paper, please get in touch with:

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Mainstream programme 2023-2026+

Project	Priority area	Current total budget £m	Anticipated completion	Additional Information
Greater Norwich Area Projects				
Blofield Primary inc. nursery	A1/A3	11.850	2024	Relocation and expansion to 2FE, and access road
Cringleford Primary	A1	11.450	2024	New 2FE Primary school
Hethersett High Academy	A2	10.000	2024/25	Expansion of existing school
Poringland Primary	A4	0.935	2023	New studio hall
Poringland Primary (new school)	A1	0.050	TBC	New 2FE Primary school
North Norwich/Rackheath New High School	A1	0.050	2026+	New High School
Silfield Primary (new school)	A1	11.560	2024	New 2FE Primary school
Wymondham High Academy	A1	11.500	2025	Expansion of existing school

Other projects

Attleborough High Academy	A1	0.500	TBC	Expansion of existing school
Bradwell Primary (new school)	A1	4.500	2025	Relocation and expansion to 2FE
Downham Market Academy expansion	A1	0.050	TBC	Expansion of existing school to meet catchment
Holt Primary	A1/A3	8.000	2026	Relocation and expansion to 2FE
King's Lynn Academy	A1	5.500	2024/25	Expansion of existing school
Thetford Primary (new school)	A1	0.600	2026	New 2FE Primary school

SEND Capital Programme/Local First Inclusion

Existing programme

Project	Priority area	Total allocation** £m	Completion	Additional Information
Swaffham new SEN	B1	25.800	2025	Expansion and relocation of existing school and land acquisition
Sheringham Woodfield Complex Needs School	B1	5.400	TBC	Expansion of existing school and land acquisition
Sidestrand Hall	B1	2.000	TBC	contribution to DFE scheme
4th new special school - East	B1	0.050	2026	New Complex Needs school
5th new special school - ASD West	B1	0.050	2026	New ASD school

** not all projects are fully funded

Specialist Resource Bases

Acle Academy	B1	0.500	TBC	New 20 place ASD SRB
Alderman Peel High, Wells	B1	0.500	TBC	New 20 place ASD SRB
Greyfriars Primary, King's Lynn	B1	1.750	TBC	New 16 place ASD SRB
Sprowston Infant SRB	B1	0.500	Autumn 2024	Expansion of existing SRB
Watton Junior Academy	B1	1.717		New 16 place SEMH SRB
New Primary SRBs Local First Inclusion	B1	20.000	Summer 2024	13 new SRBs - sites to be defined
New Secondary provision Local First Inclusion	B1	30.000	TBC	New units TBC

**Children's Services Capital Priorities Group
Draft Terms of Reference, Membership**

Terms of Reference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to consider and scrutinise the planning and implementation of Norfolk County Council's Children's Services capital programmes • to contribute on a confidential basis to discussions about priorities for capital expenditure • to develop consistent prioritisation criteria for capital expenditure and advise the Director of Children's Services on recommendations to be made to Cabinet • to monitor capital building programmes • review the effectiveness of capital prioritisation and adapt criteria accordingly • to report the work of the group to Cabinet and People and Communities Select Committee through reports, in accordance with the annual pupil place and capital planning cycle • to appoint a named substitute for each constitutional position of the Group • to ensure that the processes of the Group enable local elected Members to be kept fully informed about place planning matters and capital plans for their Division
Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Wilson – Director, Quality and Transformation, Children's Services (Chair) • Sam Fletcher – Assistant Director, Strategy and Infrastructure • Dawn Filtness - Finance Business Partner • Isabel Horner – Sufficiency Delivery Manager • Penny Carpenter – Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Conservative) • Mike Smith-Clare – County Councillor (Labour) • Karen Vincent – Deputy Cabinet Member (Conservative) • Andrew Jamieson – County Councillor (Conservative) • Richard Pollard – Director of Project Management, NPS Property Consultants • Peter Rout – School Governor (Norfolk Governors Network) • Simon Minter – Headteacher, Hillside Primary School (NPHA) • Pam Ashworth – Headteacher, John Grant Special School (NASSH) • Neil McShane – Principal of Attleborough Academy (NSEL)
Clerk	<p>Contact: Jamie Tolman Capital Projects Officer, Children's Services</p> <p>Telephone: 01603 638355</p> <p>Email: jamie.tolman@norfolk.gov.uk</p>
Frequency	Approximately twice a term.

Local First Inclusion Update

The Local First Inclusion Programme is all about improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND ensuring, wherever possible and appropriate, they can attend school close to their home/in their community with the support they need to make progress in their learning alongside other children of the same age.

Local First Inclusion is a six-year programme which has been agreed by the Secretary of State, as part of the DfE 'safety valve' programme, securing DfE investment of £70m alongside NCC investment of c. £35m. This investment is aimed at ensuring we can collectively improve assessment, support, services and provision for children and young people with SEND whilst also achieving a balanced High Needs Block budget over the medium / long term.

Local First Inclusion complements our Norfolk Area SEND Strategy and ensures that we can address the range of issues that have been identified over the past few years through co-production with parents/carers, young people and the professionals that support them within NCC, early years settings, schools, colleges and the health commissioned providers.

This six-year programme is ambitious and complex. To ensure that we can deliver on our aims and objectives and the outputs and outcomes signed off by the Secretary of State, we have designed a programme of 80 projects within 5 overarching workstreams:

- Workstream 1 – Mainstream School Inclusion, Culture and Practice
- Workstream 2 – Early Help & Inclusion / School & Community Teams
- Workstream 3 – School Led Alternative Provision Models
- Workstream 4 – Commissioning/Using Independent Sector Differently
- Workstream 5 – SEND Sufficiency & Capital Delivery

These workstreams have been developed to address a range of issues in Norfolk that have been identified through previous co-production work with parents/carers, young people and education and health professionals, within our Area SEND Strategy joint working. These workstreams also provide the basis for us to respond to the evidence base set out in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for SEND. In summary these issues are:

- Ongoing rise nationally and locally of the identification of special educational needs – with the SEN Support cohort at 13.6% in Norfolk (12.6% nationally) and the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) cohort at 4.1% Norfolk (4% nationally)

- Historic over-reliance, in Norfolk, on the independent specialist sector and a need to build more state-funded special schools and specialist resource bases
- A difference, on average, between independent specialist schools and state-funded special schools in terms of quality (as judged by Ofsted) and costs (with, on average, state-funded special schools costing c. 50% less)
- Historic and current over-reliance on referrals for EHCP rather than taking advantage of the range of funding and specialist support available at SEN Support
- Need for greater co-ordination of advice, guidance, support and services for early years settings, schools and colleges from the LA and Health commissioned services
- A lack of confidence from parents/carers that their children's needs can be fully met from within local mainstream schools and the perception that EHCPs are required to guarantee support.

The DfE is working with over 30 Local Authorities that are experiencing ongoing budget pressures within their High Needs Block budget (the budget from government within the overall 'Dedicated Schools Grant' that is used to pay for Norfolk special schools, specialist resource bases, additional funding for SEND in mainstream schools, alternative provision and commissioned services, e.g Speech and Language Therapy). This programme of work by the DfE with local authorities is known as 'Safety Valve' and has an explicit aim to develop a joint investment package between the DfE and LAs to ensure that transformational change to meet current and future needs of children and young people with SEND can occur alongside addressing historic underinvestment and associated cumulative budget pressures and deficits.

Norfolk was invited into the 'safety valve' programme in May 2022 and the culmination of the negotiation resulted in a published agreement by the DfE, following Secretary of State approval, in March 2023. The combined investment within this programme is over £100m revenue in addition to new capital funding agreed in principle by the DfE in excess of £25m.

Therefore, Local First Inclusion is Norfolk County Council's next stage SEND Improvement Programme covering the period 2023-29. It marks the end of the first phase of our improvement planning, through the completion of the initial SEND & Alternative Provision Programme and our Written Statement of Action, having built the initial special schools and specialist resource bases and having had a positive experience within the Ofsted/CQC inspection revisit in November 2022.