

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

When: Thursday 13 March 2025 at 19:00

Where: Room 1.02, Civic, 1 Saxon Gate East, Milton Keynes, MK9 3EJ. This meeting will not be live streamed, but a recording of the meeting will be available on [YouTube](#) as soon as practical after the meeting.

Public Speaking

Persons wishing to speak on an agenda item must give notice by not later than 18:45 pm on the day of the meeting. Requests can be sent in advance by email to democracy@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Members of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Bailey (Chair)

Councillors D Hopkins (Vice-Chair), Raja (Vice-Chair), Adewale, Bamisile, V Hopkins, Kendrick, Lancaster, O'Neill, Oguntola and Soden

Co-Opted Namrata Kothari, Toby Long, Ify Oduko and Georgina Thompson

Enquiries

Please contact George Vincent on 01908 252050 or george.vincent@milton-keynes.gov.uk

For more information about attending or participating in a meeting please see overleaf.

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Agenda

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Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair to welcome members of the committee, officers, any external witnesses, and the public to the meeting and introduce committee members, officers and witnesses who are present.

2. Apologies

To receive any apologies.

3. Disclosures of Interest

Councillors to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests, other registerable interests, or non-registerable interests (including other pecuniary interests) they may have in the business to be transacted, and officers to declare any interests they may have in any contract to be considered.

4. Minutes (Pages 5 - 10)

To approve, and the Chair to sign as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 05 February 2025.

5. Action Tracker (Pages 11 - 14)

6. National SEND Reforms and Preparations (Pages 15 - 26)

7. Post 16 Provision and Support in Milton Keynes (Pages 27 - 42)

8. School Travel Support - Post 16 Transport (Pages 43 - 54)

9. 2024/25 Work Programme (Pages 55 - 56)

The Committee's 2024/25 Work Programme and 2025/26 Draft Work Programme are attached for information.

Please note that all scrutiny Work Programmes remain flexible and may be subject to change at short notice depending on circumstances at any one time.

If there are any other items within the Committee's remit which members of the Committee would like to see included in the Work Programme, please bring them to the attention of the Committee's Planning Group (Chair, Vice-Chairs & Scrutiny Officer).

Information Items - The following items are presented to the Committee for information only and are not for discussion:

10. For Information - EHCPs National and local context (Pages 57 - 58)

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Minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 5 February 2025 at 19:00

Present: Councillor Bailey (Chair)
Councillors D Hopkins, Raja, Bamisile, Bell, V Hopkins, Kendrick, Lancaster, O'Neill, Oguntola and Soden and Independent Members, N Kothari, I Oduko and G Thompson

Apologies: Councillor Adewale (substituted by Councillor Bell)

Also Present: Councillor J Hearnshaw and L Aird

Officers: M Denny (Assistant Director - Education, Learning and Inclusion), M Heath (Director - Children's Services), S Marshall (Assistant Director - Children's Social Care), A Talbot (Principal Officer for Education Outcomes) and G Vincent (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer)

CYP20 Apologies

Apologies had been received from Councillor Adewale, who was substituted by Councillor Bell.

CYP21 Disclosures of Interest

Councillor David Hopkins advised for transparency that he was Vice Chair of Governors at New Chapter School in Coffee Hall. Councillor Kendrick advised for transparency that he was a governor of Germander Park School and Southwood School in Conniburrow.

CYP22 Minutes

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 10 December 2024 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

CYP23 Recommendations/Action Tracker

RESOLVED -

1. That the Committee note that the item on Child Poverty would be brought to the meeting of the Committee scheduled for June 2025 to incorporate the findings of the Vital Signs MK Community Foundation Report.
2. That the updated Action Tracker be received and noted.

CYP24 Locality Based Working - Schools as Community Spaces

The Assistant Director, Sophie Marshall introduced the report to the committee, highlighting the following points:

- That following COVID, services had been centralised in the Civic Offices.
- That officers were looking into moving back to locality-based working, such as using family and children's centres, GP surgeries, and medical centres.

Questions from members were subsequently received:

- Members inquired whether new buildings were required to facilitate use as quadrant-based hubs, or whether existing facilities could be more effectively utilised, and were told that existing stock was being utilised effectively, with conversations taking place with newer facilities that were still being built.
- Members queried whether cost was an issue in using trust-based facilities such as schools, and asked what work was being done on this. Officers responded, advising the committee that dependent on the trust, facilities were provided free of charge, as trusts recognized the value and their role in the community.
- Louise Aird, Headteacher, stressed to members that many schools wanted to take on a more active role in the community and that schools would welcome the quadrant system and the opportunity to do so. It was noted that due to varying growth numbers, some schools found themselves with extra room, which could be used by the community.
- Members emphasised the importance of sufficient safeguarding and a secure environment.
- A member proposed several considerations to be incorporated into the design of new schools, these included health provision, SEND needs, community events, supplementary education provision, library facilities Youth Clubs, Faith Groups, Forest Schools, access, security, safeguarding, value for money and community access agreements. This was supported by the Committee who resolved to refer the recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.
- The Chair commented on the need for buildings to be designed with the ability to lock doors internally to allow for proper safeguarding alongside community use.
- Members echoed the importance of local provision of services through facilities such as family centres, in particular for those with negative experiences with schools.
- The Committee expressed concern over increasing costs of running venues, and the potential impacts of this on community provision.
- Officers responded to comments from members, acknowledging potential safeguarding concerns if sites had mixed use, but that lessons learnt were being applied to new school designs. Additionally, it was stated that as school leaders were ultimately responsible for the site, the types of use would always be limited.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People be asked to consider how to work towards better community access agreements for schools.

2. That the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People be asked to promote working with School Leaders to enhance community-based provision of services in Milton Keynes.
3. That the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People be asked to adopt the following criteria to be adhered to for all future design briefs for new schools built in Milton Keynes:

“That schools should be designed as community hubs in that:

 - The Community needs for health provision are considered.
 - The provision of the particular needs of SEND students are considered in the design and layout of the school.
 - Daytime events such as community coffee mornings, social gatherings, and the services of the social support sector (e.g Community Action) are factored in.
 - That the possible hiring needs of those offering supplementary education provision are considered (thus providing additional choice for the community at large and an additional income stream for the school).
 - That local library facilities be designed in.
 - That provision for Youth Clubs and Youth Support services be considered.
 - That thought be given to the support of faith groups for the provision of worship.
 - That the sports and leisure facilities of the school be made available to the community at large outside of school’s hours and out of term time.
 - That the needs of the Forest School provision be considered when designing the school grounds.
 - That the provision of lifelong learning services be considered.
 - That any school trust, MAT, or a school transferring to a new site be required to sign as Community Access Agreement as part of an agreement to offer school provision on that site.
 - That schools be designed with access, security and safeguarding as the paramount consideration, with consideration also given to achieving value for money for the wider community. “
 - A member suggested that the college campuses could be used more effectively after standard teaching hours.
4. That the Director of Children’s Services continue to utilise family centres in conjunction with schools when progressing locality-based working.

CYP25 Ofsted Inspection Update

The item was introduced by the Assistant Director, Sophie Marshall, the following salient points were set out:

- That Milton Keynes had been graded good in the Ofsted Inspection that had taken place in October.
- That experience of care leavers had been rated outstanding.

- That areas for improvement had been identified and were set out in the action plan, with looked after children in out of area placements being highlighted as an issue.

Comments were subsequently heard from members, and are set out below:

- Members expressed their thanks and congratulations to officers on the outcome of the inspection and the good work done as corporate parents.
- A member queried whether advertisement for foster carers would increase moving forward as it had previously been an issue. Officers advised that the foster care recruitment strategy had changed, with emphasis on online and radio advertisement. Members were informed that the most successful route for new foster carers was word of mouth. Members stressed the need to recruit foster carers which could handle specific needs.
- Officers were asked whether actions plans would reflect the new grading system, and told the committee that this was not yet known.
- A member inquired about local residential provision, and was told that officers were working towards opening more specialist local provision to enable children to access locally. The Committee were told that a proposed local provision was due to be decided upon in March, which would help shape policy once its impact and success could be determined.
- The Committee asked why children from outside Milton Keynes could access local provision, but local children could not, and was told that this was due to privately owned and operated providers that work with other local authorities.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Committee recorded their thanks and congratulations to Officers for their work and the inspection result.
2. That the Planning Group be asked to consider including an item on the work program on in-house provision of residential care for children as suggested by the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee.
3. That the Committee noted that fostering remained an issue in particular for those with specific or unique needs, and that Members were encouraged to promote fostering opportunities where possible.

CYP26 Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers

The item was introduced by the Assistant Director – Children’s Services, who set out the following key aspects of the report:

- That 83% of the social worker workforce was permanent, which was better than the average for the area.
- That the primary route for recruitment was through the teaching partnership and apprenticeship routes.
- That it was difficult to retain and recruit senior social workers.
- That the average time of service was 8 ½ years, with roles from deputy team manager up being filled fully by permanent staff.
- That advertisement campaigns had taken place, but it was too soon to gauge their impact.

Members subsequently commented:

- A member inquired what package was offered to staff, and whether counselling was provided. Officers advised that there was a commissioned psychologist where social workers could talk and offload issues separate from the management structure.
- Officers were asked at what stage in their career did staff move on, and was told it was usually when they reached senior social worker level due to a variety of factors.
- A member inquired whether there were secondment opportunities with other authorities, and whether this would improve retention. Officers advised in response that there was a mentorship program across the BLMK Partnership which allowed staff to experience other authorities.
- The Committee sought confirmation on how many student placements came through each year, and how they were utilised. Officers advised that each team had a cap of 4 newly qualified social workers each year, and that currently there were 34 newly qualified social workers in the service. It was stated that due to potential risks involved, it was not recommended that the number exceed the cap.
- In response to member comments, officers clarified that a workforce board was working on a strategy for recruitment and retention of children's social workers. Officers stressed the differences between adult and children's social workers.
- The Committee discussed retention methods, including loyalty payments, interviews with long serving colleagues and support with health issues.
- A member inquired whether it would be possible to overstaff social worker roles to reduce the reliance on agency workers, and was told that it was an aspirational possibility, however it was not currently achievable.
- A committee member asked officers how they were using AI to aid recruitment, as well as radio advertisement. Officers told the committee that AI helped to create algorithms which enabled targeted advertisements, and that radio advertisement was being carried out. Members stressed the importance of using local community radio to aid recruitment.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Director of Children's Services be asked to continue to pursue targeted recruitment of social workers and utilise local resources such as radio stations to do so.
2. That the Committee noted that the Director of Children's Services would develop a recruitment and retention strategy for Children's Social Workers.

CYP27 2024/25 Work Programme

RESOLVED –

1. That the work program be noted.

CYP28 For Information - Milton Keynes Education Outcomes (2024)

This item was for information only and was not discussed.

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Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Action Tracker

Item	Outcome	Lead Officer	Action Since Last Review	Current Indicator
11 September 2024				
7. Ofsted Preparation Scrutiny Report	That the planning group be asked to consider including an item focussing on recruitment, vacancies, and staff retention at a future meeting.	Democratic Services Officer	An item was brought to the meeting of the Committee on 5 February 2025.	COMPLETED
	That officers facilitate visits if requested by members to view the Local Authority's social workers, children, family centres, and health provision	Director of Children's Services	Officers are continuing to arrange visits if requested.	IN PROGRESS
10 December 2024				
5. Education Outcomes Update	That the Director of Children's Services provide the Committee with the 2024 attainment data once available.	Director of Children's Services	An information item was brought to the meeting of the Committee on 5 February 2025.	COMPLETED
7. Place Planning - Falling PAN & Place Planning	That the Director of Children's Services continue to produce guidance to support those in the school appeals and admissions process, and circulate the guidance to Councillors to assist with queries.	Director of Children's Services	That officers would continue to produce the relevant guidance and circulate it to members at the appropriate time.	IN PROGRESS
8. 2024/25 Work Programme	That the Planning Group would consider including an item on the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection.	Democratic Services Officer	An item was brought to the meeting of the Committee on 5 February 2025.	COMPLETED

Item	Outcome	Lead Officer	Action Since Last Review	Current Indicator
05 February 2025				
5. Action Tracker	That the Planning Group would consider including an item on Post-16 provision in Milton Keynes.	Democratic Services Officer	An item would be brought to the meeting of the Committee on 13 March 2025.	IN PROGRESS
	That the Committee note that the item on Child Poverty would be brought to the meeting of the Committee scheduled for June 2025 to incorporate the findings of the Vital Signs MK Community Foundation Report.	Democratic Services Officer	An item would be brought to the meeting of the Committee in June 2025	IN PROGRESS
6. Locality Based Working - Schools as Community Spaces	That the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People be asked to consider how to work towards better community access agreements for schools.	Democratic Services Officer	The recommendation was responded to by the Cabinet Member on 04/03/2025.	COMPLETED
	That the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People be asked to promote working with School Leaders to enhance community-based provision of services in Milton Keynes.	Democratic Services Officer	The recommendation was responded to by the Cabinet Member on 04/03/2025.	COMPLETED
	That the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People be asked to adopt the following criteria to be adhered to for all future design briefs for new schools built in Milton Keynes: "That schools should be designed as community hubs in that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Community needs for health provision are considered. The provision of the particular needs of SEND students are considered in the design and layout of the school. 	Democratic Services Officer	The recommendation was responded to by the Cabinet Member on 04/03/2025.	COMPLETED

Item	Outcome	Lead Officer	Action Since Last Review	Current Indicator
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daytime events such as community coffee mornings, social gatherings, and the services of the social support sector (e.g Community Action) are factored in. • That the possible hiring needs of those offering supplementary education provision are considered (thus providing additional choice for the community at large and an additional income stream for the school). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That local library facilities be designed in. • That provision for Youth Clubs and Youth Support services be considered. • That thought be given to the support of faith groups for the provision of worship. • That the sports and leisure facilities of the school be made available to the community at large outside of schools hours and out of term time. • That the needs of the Forest School provision be considered when designing the school grounds. • That the provision of lifelong learning services be considered. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That any school trust, MAT, or a school transferring to a new site be required to sign as Community Access Agreement as part of an agreement to offer school provision on that site. • That schools be designed with access, security and safeguarding as the paramount consideration, with consideration also given to achieving value for money for the wider community. “ 			

Item	Outcome	Lead Officer	Action Since Last Review	Current Indicator
Ofsted Inspection Update	That the Planning Group be asked to consider including an item on the work program on in-house provision of residential care for children as suggested by the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee.	Democratic Services Officer	It was discussed at Planning Group, and it was noted that a Task and Finish Group had been agreed which would look at this issue.	COMPLETED
	That the Director of Children’s Services continue to utilise family centres in conjunction with schools when progressing locality-based working.	Director of Children’s Services	That officers would continue to incorporate family centres when progressing locality-based working.	COMPLETED
	That the Committee noted that fostering remained an issue in particular for those with specific or unique needs, and that Members were encouraged to promote fostering opportunities where possible.	Director of Children’s Services		IN PROGRESS
Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers	That the Director of Children’s Services be asked to continue to pursue targeted recruitment of social workers and utilise local resources such as radio stations to do so.	Director of Children’s Services		IN PROGRESS
	That the Committee noted that the Director of Children’s Services would develop a recruitment and retention strategy for Children’s Social Workers.	Director of Children’s Services		IN PROGRESS

Scrutiny Report



Scrutiny committees gather evidence on issues affecting local people and can make recommendations based on their findings.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 13 March 2025

National SEND Reforms and MK Preparations

Report author **Marie Denny**
Assistant Director, Education, Learning and Inclusion

Reason for report	Requested for work programme by planning group	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	To inform executive policy development	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Pre-decision scrutiny	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Item referred by other body	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (see summary)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Summary

To update on the demand for supporting children with SEND and provide information about our local response and the drive for national reform.

1. Recommendation

1.1 The Committee is invited to note the report and offer any recommendations either to the Cabinet or Officers.

2. Background and overview

2.1 In September 2014 the biggest education reforms in a generation for children and young people with special educational needs became law under the 2010-2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government. The new “Children and Families Act” was billed as offering “simpler, improved and consistent help for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)”. It stated that “as well as protecting the schools’ budget, it will extend provision from birth to 25 years of age and promised that “the new system will extend rights and protection to young people by introducing new education, health and care plans”, (EHCPs), which would set out the level of statutory support individuals are eligible to receive.

2.2 However, an independent report commissioned by the County Councils Network and the Local Government Association and published by the ISOS Partnership in July 2024 found that:

2.2.1 The number of children and young people with EHCPs had risen from 240k in 2015 to 576k in 2023/24, an increase of 140% over 10 years. A further 1.2m children in schools

- were identified as requiring “SEN Support” below the level of a statutory EHCP, up from 990k in 2015.
- 2.2.2 There had been an increase of 60% in the numbers of children and young people in state-funded special schools and a rise of 132% in the number placed in independent special schools.
 - 2.2.3 185k pupils with an EHCP were in special schools in 2024, up from 109k in 2015. For local authorities, the cost to the High Needs Block of a local specialist school placement are £25k per year, with an independent placement costing £59k. This is compared to £8k for placing a child with an EHCP in a mainstream school.
 - 2.2.4 Outcomes for children with EHCPs had flatlined, or declined, across key educational milestones. At the end of primary school in 2022/23, only 8% of children and young people with EHCPs achieved the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics. At the other end of the age spectrum, only 30% of young people with EHCPs achieved Level 2 by age 19 compared with nearly 37% who achieved this level in 2014/15.
 - 2.2.5 Council SEND related expenditure is forecast to reach £12bn by 2026, when it was £4bn in 2014.
 - 2.2.6 Despite bespoke ‘Safety Valve’ financial support for some councils, transfers from mainstream school budgets and use of councils’ reserves, new analysis shows cumulative deficits currently stand £3.2bn this year and are projected to rise to £5bn by 2026.
 - 2.2.7 Whilst these deficits are currently held off councils’ budgets due to a temporary ‘statutory override’, councils face a financial cliff edge when this ends in March 2026. If the statutory override came to an end tomorrow, 1 in 4 councils surveyed for the report said that they would cease to be solvent within a year or less, with half stating they would cease to be solvent in three years or less.

3. The original reforms proposed

- 3.1 In 2022, the last government published its ‘SEND Improvement Plan’, designed to reform services and curtail costs. However, 8 in 10 research participants surveyed as part of the ISOS report stated they disagreed or strongly disagreed that the improvement plan would address the fundamental challenges in the system. Instead, the report argues there is a ‘strong consensus’ for a more radical programme of reform, one focused on meeting the needs of more SEND children in mainstream education. It argues that currently many mainstream schools, early years settings and colleges lack the capacity, resources, and in some cases, the expertise to meet the needs of many SEND children, resulting in more parents seeking EHCPs and an over reliance on special school placements.
- 3.2 The report recommends the new government invests in building capacity in mainstream schools to meet children’s needs, such as therapists, educational psychologists, and wider inclusion support, helping to reduce the reliance on specialist school places. It also recommends resetting the vision and guiding principles of the SEND system towards inclusion, prevention and earlier support which would cater for young people who do not have a statutory plan, *with such plans reserved for the most complex cases*.
- 3.3 These reports, and continued lobbying by councils across the country, have led to the cross-party Education Committee (which scrutinises the work of the Department for Education) launching an inquiry on 20 December 2024 entitled ‘Solving the SEND crisis’. The aim of the inquiry is to focus on how to achieve both short term stability and long-term sustainability for the SEND system to improve experiences and outcomes for

children and young people, (presumably in a more affordable way, although this isn't stated). The deadline for the call for evidence was 6 February 2025 and Milton Keynes' views were submitted via our Head of SEND (see below for detail).

4. Our local response

- 4.1 In Milton Keynes we have already been attempting to get ahead of the curve with this challenge and could not afford to wait for national reforms. We are one of few councils whose High Needs Block is not in deficit, however, demand is now such that, dependent on the increase in government funding that can be expected over the next few years, we are headed in that direction, and so we need a plan to avoid that.
- 4.2 Things we have achieved to date as a Local Area Partnership, through the SEND Strategy Working Groups, are:
 - 4.2.1 In order to raise expectations of mainstream schools to enable children with SEND to belong and thrive we have produced an "Ordinarily Available Provision" document which sets out what is expected as a consistent universal offer and schools are being trained in its application.
 - 4.2.2 Support and guidance for Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) has been produced and published, and training has been delivered in schools. We'll be monitoring the impacts on attendance and emotional resilience. This is important, not only because of the benefits to children, but also because the council has responsibility to deliver education for children who are "unable" to attend school, often very expensive tuition packages.
 - 4.2.3 We have commissioned out the educational psychologist input into assessment for EHCPs, to enable this to be addressed externally whilst our own psychologists work on skilling up the workforce on addressing inclusion and avoiding the need for plans.
 - 4.2.4 Last year we ran a process for schools to submit an expression of interest to open new "unit" provision, particularly in mainstream schools. This led to the development of 4 units at Bradwell Village School, Priory Common School, Germander Park School and Southwood School and a specific secondary pathway for children with autism at Romans Field School. This added 40 places into the local system, and commitment to increase to 78 in 2026/27.
 - 4.2.5 We have opened a 24 place local high complex needs provision at a Woodlands School site at Galley Hill to reduce reliance on high cost out of area placements.
 - 4.2.6 We have integrated SEND Place Planning into the team that has the track record of delivery for school place planning to ensure that we have a long term and sustainable strategy to offer high quality, local placements that are value for money and have less reliance on school travel support.
- 4.3 The first round of units has been very successful, and the model is proving to be more cost effective than special school placements with the average cost of a unit placement being £20k compared to the average cost of a special school placement at £30k. The new unit placements have also reduced the need for Independent Special School Placements and consequently 4 fewer places have been built into the 2025/26 budget when compared to the 2024/25 budget. The average cost of an independent school placement is currently £73k. This in turn has had an impact on the school travel support budget which is forecasting a £800k underspend at year end.
- 4.4 Things we also plan to do are:

- 4.4.1 Embed the Ordinarily Available Provision approach across all of our schools to support high quality inclusion, which will also support continued good management of the High Needs Block.
- 4.4.2 Continue to implement a partnership-wide programme of activity to improve the quality of EHC plans to ensure that the support required by this most complex group of children and young people is very clear and avoid placement breakdown which drives up cost.
- 4.4.3 We have invited more expressions of interest to open more mainstream unit provision. 24 schools have applied and these will now be evaluated to enable more capacity and expertise to be driven into the mainstream system.
- 4.4.4 Updating our SEND Strategy (due September 2025) to continue to drive collaborative approaches to SEND across education, health and care that prevents needs escalating.
- 4.4.5 A significant dive into the current commitments in the High Needs Block to ensure that all expenditure is appropriate, consistent, fair, impactful and ensures affordability for the future.

5. The possible national reforms

- 5.1 But these local interventions alone are not enough, as we are operating in a system where there is national and political acknowledgement that there must be significant fundamental change. The inquiry will therefore drive national reforms. Some of what is being suggested must change, and that we have reported back to the inquiry, is:
 - 5.1.1 Creation of a national Ordinarily Available Provision document that sets out the standard of what is expected in mainstream schools and provides consistency of expectation/inclusion, irrespective of postcode or type of school.
 - 5.1.2 Creation of a standardised SEND Support plans that must be used across the country (this is the plan to support children ahead of/instead of the need for an EHCP, but there is no statutory requirement for one and no standardised template).
 - 5.1.3 Creation of a standardised EHCP document that must be used across the country. At Year 9 consider changing the format so it is based on preparation for adulthood with all outcomes and provision supporting ability and aspiration of the young person.
 - 5.1.4 Removal of the 20 week timeframe for EHCPs, or if it stays, enabling teacher-led assessments involving wider professionals. Potential for educational psychologists to quality assure instead??
 - 5.1.5 Progressive movement towards specialist units attached to mainstream provisions (government announced £740m capital to be available to support this on 4 December 2024). This is in line with what we are already doing.
 - 5.1.6 Consideration of a reduction of the age for the requirement of EHCPs *below* the age of 25.
 - 5.1.7 Funding reforms that recognise growth (current model based on demand from 2017/18).
- 5.2 We will await the government's response to the call for change with interest, but in the meantime will continue with our own local plans to drive change, improve outcomes and ensure that funding is sustainable, minimising the risk to the council's General Fund.

List of annexes

Annex A – SEND call for evidence

Annex A

SEND Call for Evidence

Completed by Milton Keynes City Council SEND Team

Introduction:

Below outlines suggested recommendations that could be considered in relation to improving the outcomes for children and young people (CYP) with SEND. Under each of the key headings, ideas have been shared following reflection of local process and pressures faced daily by both schools and settings, families and Local Authority Officers. To support these considerations we have provided an overview of some of the things we have as a service have found to be most impactful and have introduced at a local level.

Key area of Reform	What we are doing in MK	What needs to happen nationally
<p>Support for children and young people with SEND</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Within Milton Keynes we have worked as a partnership to create an Identification of Need and Ordinarily Available Provision document that outlines what all schools and settings should be delivering for consistency across the city. This has just recently been launched and schools are expected to use this document to support meeting the needs of the majority of children and young people without the need for an EHCP. - Milton Keynes has created a SEND Support plan (SSP) that sets out clearly the needs of the child and through an APDR cycle outlines what provision and support is needed for the CYP. This supports consideration whether a CYP should progress to assessment for an EHCP. - Milton Keynes has a universal training offer that supports schools in meeting needs of their CYP, this is reviewed regularly and links to priorities on our SEND Action Plan. Success is dependent on schools accessing the training. - Milton Keynes has a Specialist Teaching Team that supports early identification of need and meeting need within schools as well as transitioning CYP back into education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion should be central and at the forefront of how schools deliver their provision. SEND Support should be key and consistent for all mainstream schools. This would stop families feeling they need to move to receive a better quality of education either within the same LA or wider. Clear expectations should be set out for all schools in how they support children and young people with SEND using a graduated response. - Consideration should be given to a standardised SEND Support plan (SSP) that sets out clearly the needs of the child and through a APDR cycle and outlines what provision and support is needed for the CYP, this could be a levelled approach depending on the need of the child and what support is required. It should be co-produced by the family, school and wider professionals supporting the CYP, including health and social care. Milton Keynes have devised a SSP and when used effectively supports CYP in making progress. This is reliant on schools and settings all using the template consistently. - Outcomes for CYP at SEND Support should be reported by schools to show progress, not just academic data with assessments used to support collection against outcomes. - All schools should access training to support CYP with SEND with schools needing to evidence how they have developed their workforces understanding of SEND needs and also their role in ensuring needs are being appropriately met. Local Authorities could be given more power to hold schools to account for staff develop whether they are

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Milton Keynes has a specific 'place planning for SEND places' working group that use data to advise where projected places are needed. 	<p>maintained or academy. There could be national online courses outlining the SEND Law to ensure everyone receives consistent messages and shares the same understanding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher training and support staff qualifications should have compulsory SEND training that has to be completed including practical experience of working across the different types of provisions. - Schools should be trained to deliver standardised assessments for CYP attending their schools and have the ability to analyse those assessments and transfer the findings into the SEND Support Plan. - Create an Identification of Need and Ordinarily Available Provision document that outlines what all schools and settings should be delivering for consistency, could be a nationally agreed document - Specialist Teaching teams could be used to enable high quality inclusive education focusing on CYP remaining at their local mainstream schools. The teams should empower schools to ensure CYP want to attend and feel supported when they are there. - Gathering the voice of the CYP to share what makes a school inclusive and what more schools can do to ensure CYP want to attend school. Most LA's have a SEND Youth Councils, could they be used to support? - Consideration of sharing expertise across the system, more partnership working between specialist settings and
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		<p>mainstream, special schools should cater for most complex with clear entry criteria, LA's should have final decision making on those who need the spaces based on information shared via the schools and professionals working with the CYP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progressive moving towards specialist units attached to mainstream provisions will mean schools have expertise on site, Units should have specialisms and different pathways to support the varying needs.
<p>Education, Health and Care Plans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whilst CYP are waiting for an EHC needs assessment, top up funding and advice from Specialist Teaching Team can be provided to ensure needs are met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remove the 20-week timeframe, in current climate this is unachievable and builds false hope for families when EP assessments take too long to be completed. <p>If there is to be a specific timeframe, consideration should be given to using teacher led assessments and wider professional reports, could EPs be used to quality check reports and also form part of the final decision making? If an EP assessment is essential this could be completed ahead of the request for an EHC assessment with evidence of how the strategies have been implemented (Schools could use some of their funding to commission EP's at SEND Support level). This would help with parental expectations as all reports are completed ahead of the request and evidence would form a basis of decision to issue or not. This would speed up decision making as it would be agreement to issue a plan or not.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CYP should have more say in whether they need an EHCP and what benefit it would bring to them, especially with the older young person (YP), if a YP can give a view they should, specifically linked to this.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consideration to the age of the YP when the EHCP ceases, what are the benefits of going to 25 vs statutory school age, what impact/ value added is there in having an EHCP outside statutory school age, it delays some YP getting support from adult services or progressing into employment. Some of our older YP no longer want an EHCP however parental choice dominates decisions. - If a LA makes a decision an EHCP is not required and needs can be supported at SEND support this decision should be final, if it is a no LA's should provide clear reasons and what actions should be implemented. Consider a change in language from 'may' have a SEND need to 'must', and this SEND need should be supported by wider professionals, not just based on parental opinion. - Consideration if a CYP has a specific health need that is not impacting their ability to learn introducing health plans instead of EHCPs. There are some examples (where a child has diabetes for example) that a health plan would be sufficient to meet needs. - Have one template for all EHCPs that must be used across the country. At Year 9 consider changing the format so it is based on preparation for adulthood with all outcomes and provision supporting ability and aspiration of the yp.
<p>Current and future SEND need</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New consistent level of need documentation could be designed to focus more on support at SEND support level for needs such as anxiety and CYP who struggle to attend school.

		<p>Sec 19 guidance reinforces the fact that some CYP do not need to attend school and puts pressure on LAs to deliver educational packages. The emphasis and support should be within the schools to ensure the CYP attends their local school, this needs consideration for change. Funding could be better spent supporting at SEND support level rather than expensive packages which do not enable the CYP back into education going against inclusion.</p>
<p>Current and future model of SEND provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Milton Keynes is now opening more specialist Units attached to mainstream schools as opposed to opening special schools. This is to develop staff expertise but to also ensure CYP will start to attend local provision and be part of their local communities, this in turn reduces the costs of transporting CYP to schools on Home To School Transport. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide guidance and expectations on constant types of provision from mainstream, specialist units and specialist placements to ensure consistency across the country. A levelled approach could reduce need for high cost placements within the independent sector. - The majority of CYP should attend a mainstream school. If specialist is required, they would attend their most local specialist Unit attached to a mainstream school and then the most complex attend special schools. - Although the LA can name provision on an EHCP, the parent has the right to appeal, greater trust should be placed on the LA to name appropriate settings following a clear change of placement process. That setting should then be the final placement. - For place planning and demand on places consideration should be given to place funding being consistent across the country. Schools and LA's would then be able to plan effectively for both staffing and provision with a fair and funding formula.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For partnership working all local authorities should have a partnership model with a clear strategic plan that all services are held to account for. We are starting to see the impact of operating with this model. All services include schools and settings as they deliver the educational element of a CYP education. As part of inspections, schools should be measured individually on the quality of SEND support plans and EHCPs and report progress that is not only based on educational outcomes. - For independent settings introduce capped funding as suggested across all types of settings. If provision is right across the local areas there would be no need for independent provisions operating at high costs. - Within secondary schools' consideration should be given to having different pathways so CYP can achieve a variety of qualifications, some schools are opposed to delivering any qualifications other than GCSEs as it impacts their data. - The SEND Code of Practice and EHCP system operate a within a child deficit model. There is no national definition of inclusion, leading to varied interpretations. Systemic change is needed to address these issues. - Address the high exclusion rates by ensuring schools remain financially responsible for CYP until age 16. Focus on creating a supportive and inclusive school environment with a curriculum that supports their needs giving them a sense of belonging. Have a robust system wide agreement that schools will not permanently exclude CYP, working in partnership to access alt education and then reintegrate
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		<p>effectively back into mainstream education through a FAP process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve access to transport - this could be means tested, not just having access to an EHCP.
Finance, funding and capacity of SEND provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Milton Keynes offers top up funding for SEND support with clear eligibility criteria which schools have to meet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish short-term early intervention funding which is a national set amount so schools can appropriately support CYP at SEND Support level. - Agree on costs for different types of provision to avoid market-driven top-up funding demands and uplifts. This will enable LA's to ensure robust place planning. - Review funding levels across early years, educational settings, specialist settings, and independent non-maintained settings.
Accountability and inspection of SEND provision		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consideration to OFSTED focusing more on inclusivity and how needs are being met at SEND support. - Schools to be held more to account for placement breakdowns. - Offer training on writing Ombudsman responses to colleagues. - Implement a consistent and capped approach to financial remedies as remedies are adding to financial pressures. - Consider whether a financial remedy most appropriate as it does not benefit the CYP.

Scrutiny Report



Scrutiny committees gather evidence on issues affecting local people and can make recommendations based on their findings.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 13 March 2025

Post 16 provision and support in Milton Keynes

Report author **Simon Sims**
Head of Service -Access to Education, Employment, and
Training

Reason for report	Requested for work programme by planning group	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	To inform executive policy development	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Pre-decision scrutiny	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Item referred by other body	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (see summary)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Summary

Local authorities have a duty to ensure that young people can continue in education or training until they are 18 (or 25 if they have an EHCP). Whilst local authorities do not directly provide post-16 education they need to work with schools, colleges, and training providers to ensure sufficiency of provision. They must also work with partners to identify those who are not participating (Not in Education, Employment, and Training 'NEET') and provide support, advice and guidance to help them to re-engage.

Milton Keynes City Council works in collaboration with the local schools to identify and support those at risk of becoming NEET before they enter the Post 16 phase. There is also significant local collaboration to identify and address forthcoming gaps in Post 16 provision, and to provide support for those who become NEET.

As a result of this local partnership working, the proportion of young people in Milton Keynes who are NEET has remained significantly below national and regional comparators. However, in line with the national picture, the rising demographic pressures, increasing consideration of need in young people - particularly in relation to SEND and Mental Health issues, and limitations in relation to availability of funding and suitable accommodation, presents a significant challenge that we are working to address.

1. Recommendation

1.1 The Committee is invited to note the report and offer any recommendations.

2. Background and overview

- 2.1 The law requires all young people in England to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday. To increase participation and reduce the proportion of young people who are 'Not in Education Employment or Training' (NEET), responsibility and accountability lies with local authorities in supporting young people to access education and training and in understanding the characteristics and current activity of the young people in their area.
- 2.2 Local authorities are monitored in delivering their duties, and specifically in their tracking and supporting of 16 and 17-year-olds, using data collected by authorities and submitted to the National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS). NCCIS includes data showing the numbers of young people participating in education or training, those who are not participating, those who are NEET or those whose current activity is not known. Local authorities have a duty to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training for all those over compulsory school age, but under 19, or aged 19 to 25 with an Education and Health Care Plan in their area.
- 2.3 The ability for young people to engage with and access Education, Employment and Training from Post-16 is dependent on having sufficient availability of local provision. Post-16 provision is operated by a wide range of organisations, which are not directly funded by local Authorities, and local authorities do not have direct access to capital funding to support the creation of additional provision. To fulfil their duties, local authorities must therefore hold a strategic overview of demand and supply of provision within the local area, and work in partnership with a range of providers to identify local gaps through feedback and triangulation of data and agree how they might be resolved.

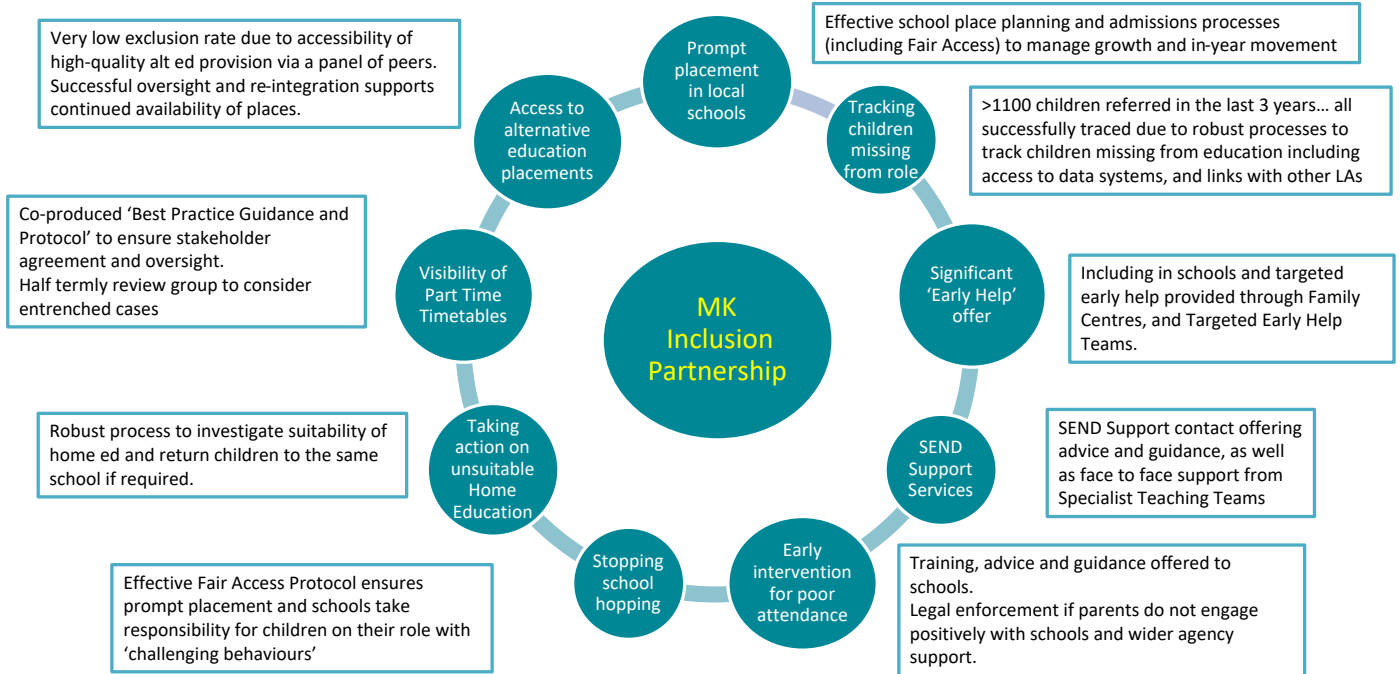
3. Main issues for scrutiny

System wide support strategies Pre-16

- 3.1 Milton Keynes City Council has collaborated with local schools to create a holistic local strategy to identify children of statutory school age that are missing, or at risk of missing, education as early as possible. The strategy is aimed at statutory school aged children and operated through the Milton Keynes Inclusion Partnership (MKIP). The strategy focusses on identifying children who are struggling to access education, identifying the underlying issues, and engaging the support required. In essence it seeks to 'close the exits' which would otherwise exist in our local school system and put vulnerable children at risk. The focus of this work at the Pre-16 phase is vital to supporting the success of our young people at post-16, and therefore reducing the risk of

them becoming NEET. The work strands within the local strategy are set out in the following graphic.

Identifying and supporting those at risk



Sufficiency of local post-16 provision and pathways

3.2 Ensuring sufficiency of local provision is crucial. Milton Keynes City Council works in partnership with local education providers and other local stakeholders, to ensure there are sufficient pathways available locally to support young people into Education, Employment, and Training, at post 16 depending on their needs and desires. The following table illustrates the local pathways currently available, and where they can be accessed:

Destination	Pathway	Provider Type
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Levels • T Levels • Vocational Courses, including BTECs and NVQs • Entry Level qualifications for those with SEND • GCSEs • International Baccalaureate 	Sixth form in school, including special schools
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Levels • T Levels • Access Courses • Foundation Courses • Level 1 and 2 courses and GCSEs, in Maths, English and Digital Skills or vocational subjects • Vocational Courses: BTECs, NVQs and others in subjects such as engineering, health and social care or business. 	Colleges, including: MK College Moulton Northampton Aylesbury Bedford

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive learning for learners with SEND in catering and hospitality, independent living, new horizons, and vocational programmes 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BTEC Level 1 in Vocational Studies Health and Wellbeing Studies 	Community Learning MK
	Entry and level 1 and 2 courses in English and Maths	Local training providers such as the Milton Keynes Christian Foundation and SOFEA
Training	Higher apprenticeships Apprenticeships Traineeships	Local employers in partnership with local colleges and training providers
	Access to higher education courses Supported Internships (SEND)	Colleges
	Study programmes in vocational areas and employability	The Christian Foundation SOFEA
Employment	Employment with or without accredited training	Local employers

3.3 A 'Post 16 Strategy Group' consisting of Local education providers and local industry representatives, meets termly to review and consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of the local pathways in supporting young people and addressing the skills shortages within local industry. The group considers local destination and NEET data, industry needs, and how national changes to the post 16 pathways could impact the local area - such as the recent introduction of T-levels. The group also makes recommendations which are followed up and progressed with appropriate stakeholders. Recent discussions highlighted the implications of the DfE plans for Post-16 change to vocational qualifications and the defunding of BTEC and other L3 courses. There is the implication that there will be a significant number of students who will not have appropriate courses to progress to and there may be capacity issues also. MK College will not have the capacity to increase its intake if schools do not offer courses appropriate to students who would previously have taken L3 vocational courses.

3.4 A 'Place Planning Group' consisting of representatives from local secondary schools and MK College meets termly to review the current and future supply and demand for Post 16 education provision and consider how any gaps in the availability of provision across Milton Keynes (particularly geographic/ demographic) might be addressed. This includes considerations of proposals to create additional sixth form places within schools and supporting bids to central government for any capital funding required. As a result, expansions are currently being progressed at Oakgrove School, St Pauls Catholic School, The Radcliffe and Watling Academy to provide additional places to support the growing demand for Post 16 provision. Based on current trends for school-based post 16 provision, these schemes are projected to provide sufficient places across the borough in

the short to medium term, but this will continue to be monitored and reviewed, along with consideration of any further localised pressures.

Support for NEET and Pre-NEET young people.

- 3.5 Local schools and education providers have their own careers advisors, who work with young people on their roll to consider their interests and potential pathways. In addition to this, Milton Keynes Council operates a Young People's Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Team as part of the Community Learning and Employment Support Service, within the wider Access to Education, Employment, and Training Service. The team focusses on tracking and supporting the most vulnerable young people aged 15-19 (up to 25 for Care Leavers and those with SEND/LLDD) who are identified as not participating, or at risk of not participating in education, employment and training (NEET). The team consist of a Team Leader, Tracking Officer, and five Personal Advisors (PAs).
- 3.6 Although the Young People's IAG Team is skilled at supporting young people who are NEET, much of their work is focussed on working proactively with schools and other teams within Children's Services to identify and support Pre-NEETs (school aged children who are at risk of becoming NEET). The team is therefore part of the same service and has close working links to the Children Missing Education Team, which plays a significant role in the MK Inclusion Partnership. Details of Pre-NEET children, including children in Year 11 who are home educated, are passed to the Young People's IAG Team to follow up, and offer support. The team also delivers an Annual Opportunities Fair in Partnership with other Children's Services teams to provide specific opportunities and support for our most vulnerable young people.
- 3.7 As the Young People's IAG Team is part of the Community Learning and Employment Support Service, there is an ability for Community Learning MK (our in-house adult education provision) to develop and design specific courses and interventions to support sufficiency of pathways and address identified needs. For instance, to support those at greatest risk of remaining long term NEET, the team is able to identify and share information regarding any specific gaps or requirements for particular courses, which could be the need for specific courses a health and wellbeing course has been developed for students as a first step back into education, and a BTEC Level 1 course offers progression for those needing longer term interventions but who are unable or not wanting to access school or college. Many of these young people are experiencing significant mental health challenges.

Impact - Year 11 Destinations

- 3.8 The latest 'moving on' data published by the DfE showing the initial destination of Yr11 leavers on 1 November 2023, which therefore accounts for movement at the start of the academic year, is set out below. This information is derived from the annual activity survey return, and shows:

- Participation rates in Milton Keynes are significantly higher than average across statistical neighbours/South East/England.
- MK is significantly above average against statistical neighbours/South East/England for those remaining in full time education (94.8%).
- Despite the above, the proportion of young people in Milton Keynes entering an apprenticeship (3.0%) is slightly higher than average for statistical neighbours/South East/England.
- ‘Not Participating’ (NEET / Unknown/other employment) rates for Milton Keynes are lower than average across all other comparable areas at 1.4%.
- Given the proportion of young people whose activity is ‘Not Known’ is significantly lower in Milton Keynes than in other areas (0.3%), there is confidence in the accuracy of the destination data, the effectiveness of the service, and the availability of local pathways for young people leaving school.

	Survey total	Participating					Not Participating			
		In education and training				Total	Other Employment	Not settled		Not known
		Full time education	Training	Apprenticeship	Employment with training			Active	Not active	
Milton Keynes	3,568	94.8%	0.8%	3.0%	0.1%	98.6%	0.3%	0.6%	0.2%	0.3%
England	634,446	90.2%	1.0%	2.9%	0.3%	94.4%	0.8%	1.90%	0.3%	2.4%
South East	100827	88.8%	0.7%	2.2%	0.1%	91.9%	0.7%	1.60%	0.2%	5.2%
Stat Neighbour average		91.3%	0.7%	2.4%	0.28%	94.9%	0.71%	2.1%	0.31%	1.8%

3.9 Further breakdown of this data over the previous three years shows that: Participation or positive destinations rates have remained stable; Young people opting for further education has increased with sixth form rates dropping slightly in 2023; Apprenticeship levels also dipped in 2023, but data suggests that students opted for T levels instead (changed their decision during the application stage); and NEET and unknown percentage remain low.

3.10 In addition to this, the DfE published the latest ‘local authority scorecard’ in January 2025, which relates to data from the end of 2023 and snapshot data in March 2024, and this also shows a very positive picture for Post 16 in Milton Keynes, particularly when compared to national and regional (see Annex A).

3.11 Whilst the destination data for Milton Keynes is consistently better than national, regional, or statistical neighbour averages, there are increasing challenges in relation to Post 16. There has been a rising demographic demand that has been experienced within the local Primary and Secondary Sector and is now transitioning into Post 16. In addition to this, there has been a significant increase in complexity of need of young people, particularly those experiencing illness and mental health barriers, who have struggled at pre-16, particularly following covid. This means there is a growing pressure for availability of places

for those working at entry level 1, and some young people just want to study the core subjects of maths and English to gain these qualifications, but this isn't possible as these subjects need to be part of a study programme. Some have expressed that they don't like the size and noise of formal learning environments and feel overwhelmed in schools or college.

4. Further actions and timescales

- 4.1 Further work with colleagues and partners (MKCC Teams, Schools and Colleges) to identify and support young people at risk of becoming NEET (Pre-NEET) as soon as possible - particularly those with SEND and mental health issues. A NEET forum is now taking place twice a month between the SEND and 16-19 CIAG team to discuss and agree actions for those who are NEET with SEND. The aim is to ensure the best pathways are sought for those young people with an EHC plan. We will continue to review and strengthen this forum over time to ensure for maximum effectiveness and outcomes.
- 4.2 Further partnership work through Post-16 Strategy and Place Planning Groups to identify potential gaps in provision and how they might be resolved - Particularly geographical gaps, and requirement for additional local SEND provision to mitigate people having to access provision out of the borough. This potentially includes delivery of smaller provision away from big campuses (subject to the availability of funding, appropriate accommodation and sustainable modelling).
- 4.3 Working with partners, including local secondary schools, to identify and secure further opportunities for apprenticeships / supported internships (for SEND).
- 4.4 Supporting young people and parents to consider future careers and pathways to employment earlier in their school life. This includes raising young people's awareness at the start of their secondary school education, of what skills and careers are needed within local industries, and what are the best pathways to this.
- 4.5 Further strategic planning of careers advice and guidance across the CLMK team to support the young people into adulthood. This will include pathways into the Connect to Work programme from the summer of 2025.

List of annexes

Annex A – Department for Education 'NEET and participation LA Scorecard' for Milton Keynes.

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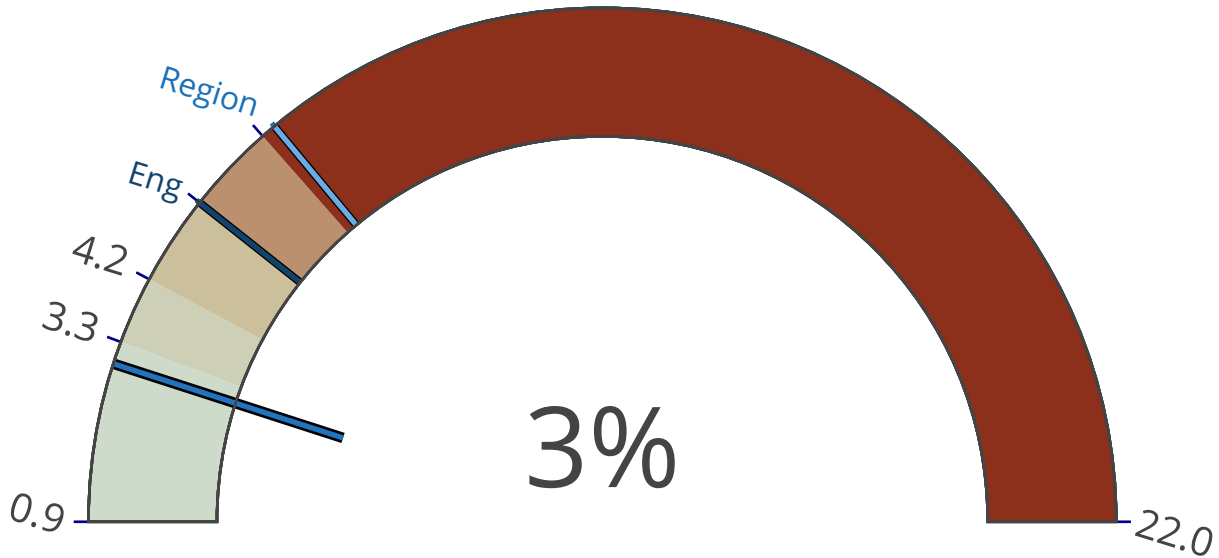


Department
for Education

NEET and participation LA score- card

Milton Keynes

NEET and not known

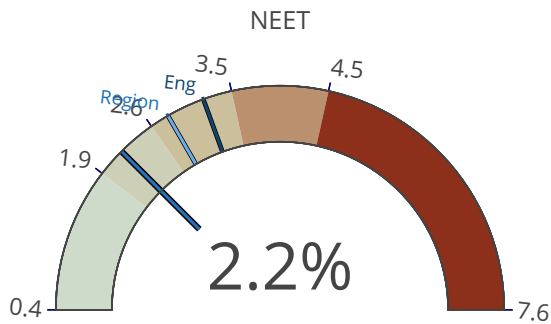


3%, down -0.3 pts

South East: 6.8%, stable 0 pts.

England: 5.4%, up 0.2 pts.

Annual changes are since end 2022.

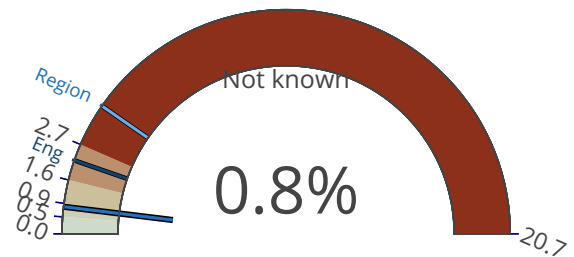


2.2%, up 0.2 pts

South East: 2.8%, up 0.3 pts.

England: 3.2%, up 0.4 pts.

Annual changes are since end 2022.



0.8%, down -0.5 pts

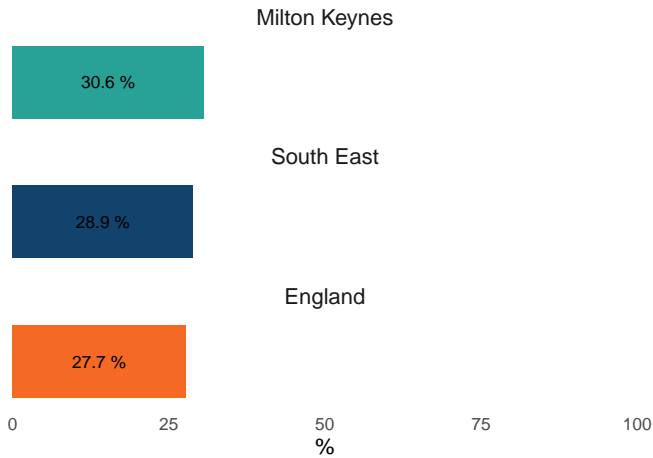
South East: 4%, down -0.4 pts.

England: 2.2%, down -0.2 pts.

Annual changes are since end 2022.

Vulnerable Groups NEET and not known

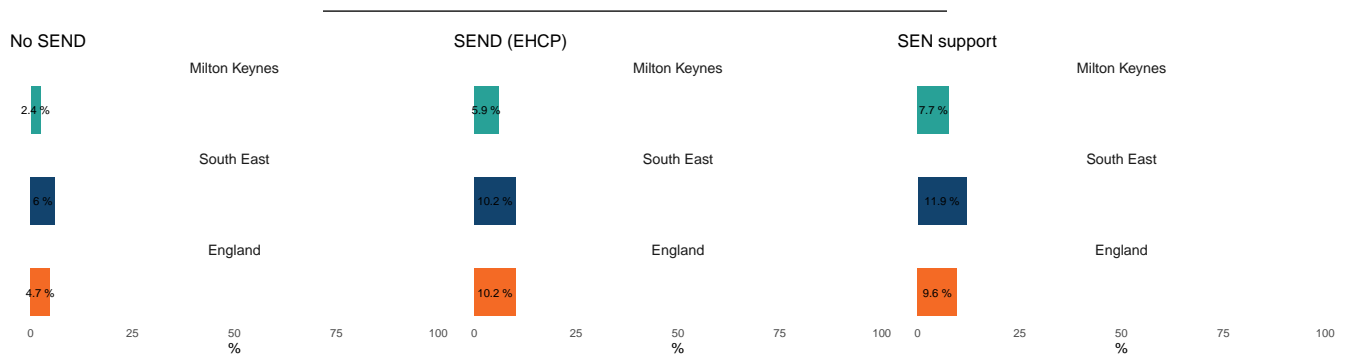
Vulnerable group



A young person is said to be in a vulnerable group if they have any of the following characteristics (taken from IC01 of the NCCIS returns):

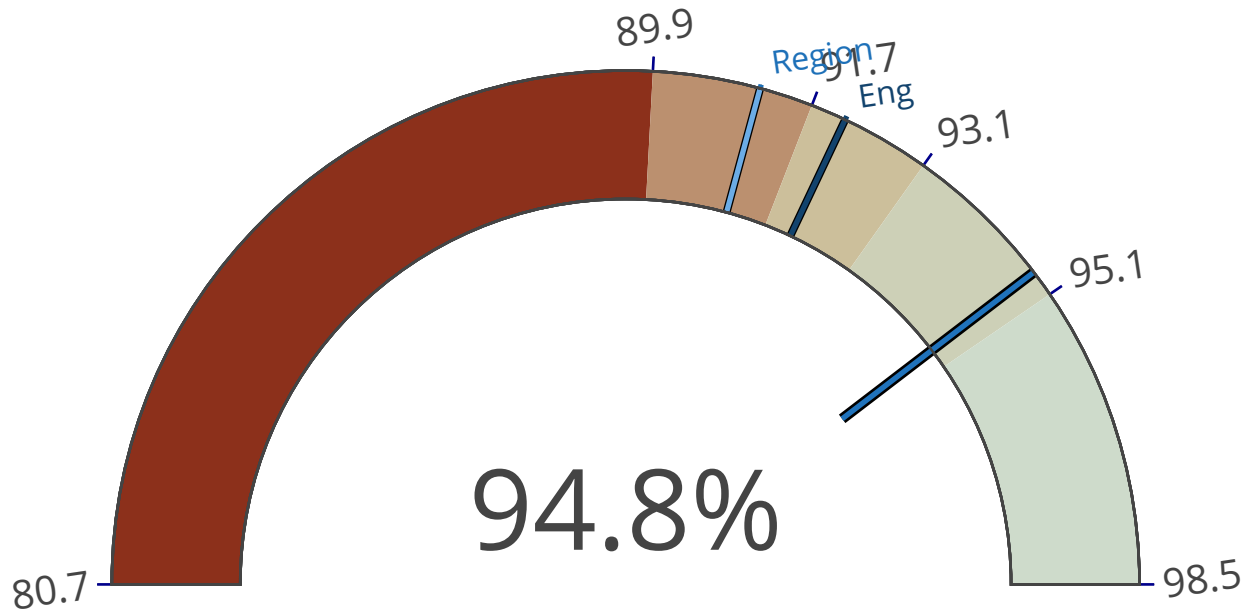
- 110 - Looked after/In care
- 130 - Refugee/Asylum seeker
- 140 - Carer-not own child
- 150 - Disclosed substance misuse
- 160 - Care leaver
- 170 - Supervised by YOT
- 190 - Parent-not caring for own child
- 200 - Alternative provision

210 - Mental health flag



Participation

Participating in education and training



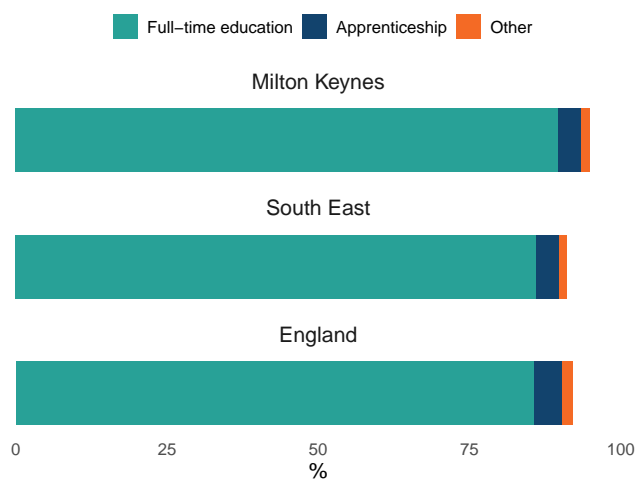
94.8%, up 0.4 pts

South East: 91.1%, down -0.1 pts.

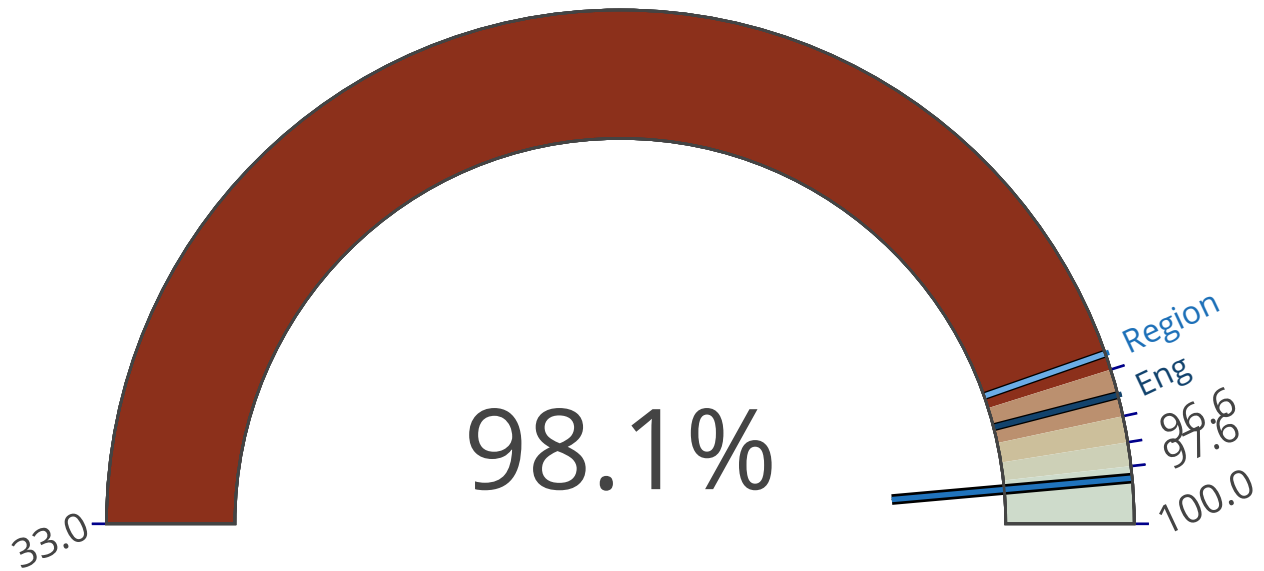
England: 92.1%, down -0.2 pts.

Annual changes are since March 2023.

Type of education and training



September Guarantee: % offered an education place



98.1%, up 0.9 pts

South East: 92.8%, stable 0 pts.

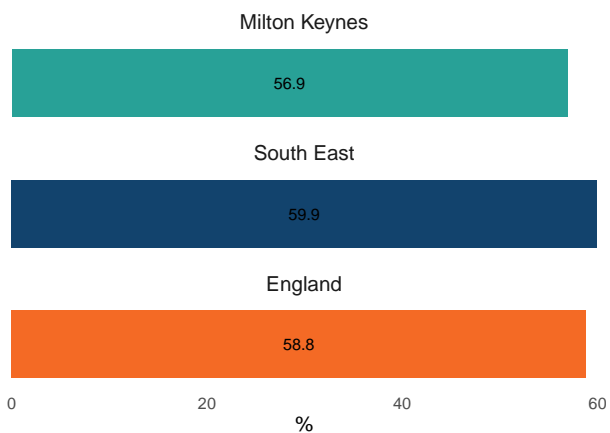
England: 94.6%, up 0.1 pts.

Annual changes are since September 2022.

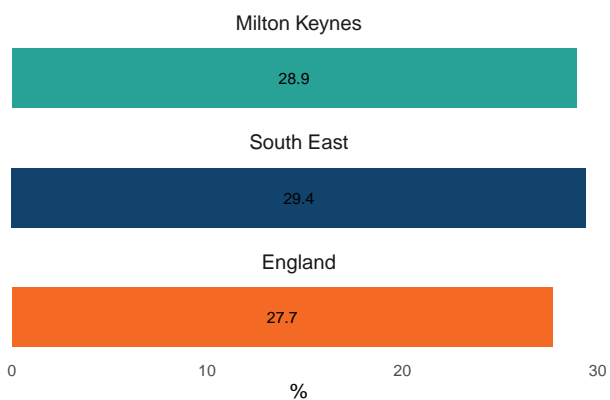
Contextual - attainment and attendance

Post 16 attainment

% 19 year olds achieving level 3

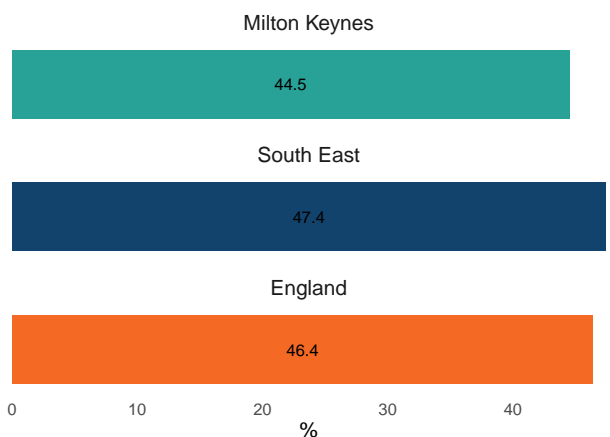


% 19 year olds achieving GCSE 9–4 standard pass in English and maths between ages 16 and 19

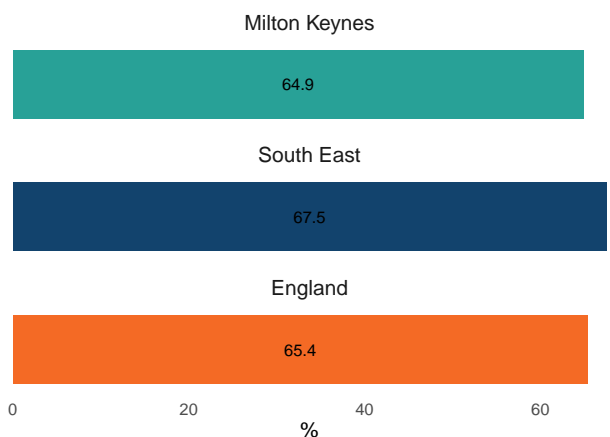


GCSE attainment

Average attainment 8 score per pupil



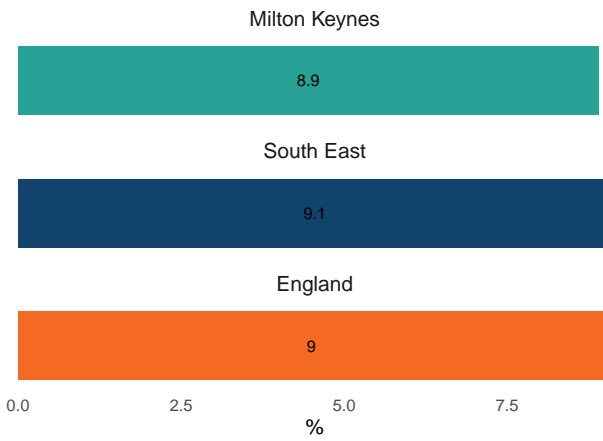
% 9–4 standard pass in English and maths GCSEs



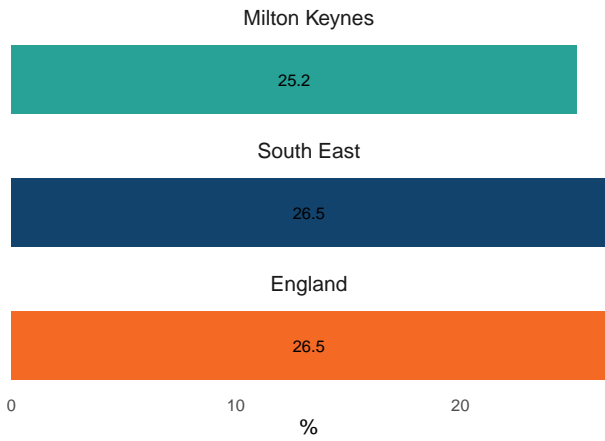
Contextual - attainment and attendance

School attendance

Overall absence (% of sessions)



Persistent absentees (% of pupils)



16-17 LA population



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Scrutiny Report



Scrutiny committees gather evidence on issues affecting local people and can make recommendations based on their findings.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – March 2025

School Travel Support – Post 16 Transport

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Reason for report	Requested for work programme by planning group	<input type="checkbox"/>
	To inform executive policy development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Pre-decision scrutiny	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Item referred by other body	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (see summary)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Summary

This report has been drafted for the committee to review the current position relating to Post 16 School Travel Support and advise of the proposed changes required to deliver the necessary savings.

Significant work has taken place to reduce the costs of school travel support. This has included significant changes to policies for compulsory school age children, but there has been limited focus so far in relation to policies for Post 16.

Due to pressures on the Council's General Fund, there is a £50k saving target associated with Post 16 transport for the 25/26 financial year and further savings in the following three financial years totalling an overall saving from the base budget of £200k. A number of potential options for policy amendments/changes to deliver these savings have been identified and listed in the report for consideration.

It is proposed that implementation of any proposed changes are introduced gradually as cohorts transition to post 16, or transition to new post 16 courses, rather than making changes to those already accessing particular courses.

Policy development foreword

Milton Keynes City Council needs to consider revisions to the policy statement in line with national guidance, to update and improve the definition of who is deemed eligible, agree on any changes to default offers, and whether a parental contribution should be required.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 The Committee is invited to note the report and offer any recommendations either to the Cabinet or Officers.

2. Background and overview

- 2.1 Milton Keynes City Council has a statutory duty to offer free transport support to compulsory school aged children (aged 5 to 16 years in current national guidance) to those who meet the nationally set eligibility criteria.
- 2.2 Currently, as per DfE Guidance, Local Authorities are not legally required to offer and arrange transport for children under the 6th Form duty (16-19) but Local Authorities must publish a transport policy statement on or before 31 May each year. The statement must include the details of the transport arrangements and the details of the financial support in respect of reasonable travelling expenses that the local authority considers it necessary to make to facilitate access to education or training for learners of sixth form age for the following academic year.
- 2.3 For those under the 6th Form Duty the national guidance is less clear in terms of defined eligibility and legal elements of transport options offered. At pre-16, families can reject any offer that involves them having to manage money themselves (mileage and Family Led Travel Budget options) whereas it is less clear at post 16. Furthermore, the 6th Form duty legislation 'gives local authorities the flexibility to 'contribute to, fund or charge for other transport solutions where it wishes'.
- 2.4 Under the Post 19 Duty (19-25), under section 508B and Schedule 35B of the Education Act 1996, LA's are legally obligated to provide free school transport to "eligible children".
- 2.5 The overall intention of the adult transport duty is to ensure that those with the most severe disabilities, with no other means of transportation, are able to undertake further education and training after their 19th birthday to help them move towards more independent living.

3. Main issues for scrutiny

- 3.1 Significant work has taken place since 2017, with great effect, in relation to the provision of school travel support to reduce the cost to the General Fund. This includes measures such as ensuring the support offered is always the cheapest option available that meet the needs of the family; implementing a dynamic purchasing system to ensure a competitive provider marketplace; and securing the most efficient route planning for the transport we directly commission. There has also been a significant focus in the last two years in relation to SEND school place planning with a view to increase the availability of local SEND provision within Milton Keynes via the creation of additional local specialist placements at special schools, and units within mainstream schools. This has

sought to negate the need for families to receive travel support or to reduce the cost of the support required.

- 3.2 As most children receiving school travel support in Milton Keynes are compulsory school age, significant work has also taken place in relation to our policies and eligibility considerations in relation to this age group. Less scrutiny and consideration have been given to our policy and eligibility criterion for post 16.
- 3.3 Currently there are approximately 1,400 children of compulsory school age receiving free travel support to access education, and national data shows the cost of delivery per capita for this cohort is currently under the national average for children with and without SEND. The table below, shows the average national cost per capita for pre-16 SEN transport is £130 per week and £43 for mainstream children, whereas the Milton Keynes average cost per capita for children with SEN is £85 and £36 for those without.
- 3.4 Currently there are 181 children being transported to placements under the ‘Sixth Form duty’. National data shows the per capita cost of supporting this cohort is in line with the national average of £70 per week; however, unlike Milton Keynes, many surrounding areas request a contribution from families of this age group to allow access onto transport (other than those on low income). On average other LA’s charge between £500-£1,000 each academic year.
- 3.5 Currently there are 45 children under the Post 19 duty being transported to placements. National data shows the per capita cost of this is currently significantly above the national average (England £11 per week v MK £21 per week).

	2.1.4 Home to school transport (pre 16): SEN transport expenditure (C)	2.1.5 Home to school transport (pre 16): mainstream home to school transport expenditure (C)	2.1.6 Home to post-16 provision: SEN/LLDD transport expenditure (aged 16-18) (F)	2.1.7 Home to post-16 provision: SEN/LLDD transport expenditure (aged 19-25) (G)	2.1.8 Home to post-16 provision transport: mainstream home to post-16 transport expenditure (F)
ENGLAND - Average	£130.00	£43.00	£70.00	£11.00	£14.00
Milton Keynes	£85.00	£36.00	£70.00	£21.00	£1.00

- 3.6 The total cost of Post 16 transport (based on current average cost per option) is £1.1m per academic year. Of the 226 children receiving post 16 transport, 129 (56%) attend special schools, and the majority have continued into the Post 16 provision after previously attending the school. These children typically continue to receive support by way of MKCC commissioned transport as it is not currently re-reviewed at this point. Commissioned transport usually costs significantly more than the other support options (see table below showing current average costs per child per annum).

Option	Ave. Cost
Mileage	£1,359
FLTB	£3,427
Shared	£5,624

- 3.7 There are currently 32 children attending Out of Area post 16 provisions at a cost of £210k per academic year, which is an increase from £145k last year. Costs have increased due the number of children increasing from 22 to 32, and because Moulton College in Northamptonshire took the decision to increase the cost of their college bus which collects children from Milton Keynes.
- 3.8 Currently our policy ‘Prioritises support for those attending specialist provisions or in receipt of a specific grade of High Needs Funding’; however, it does not require MKCC SEND Service to confirm in advance that this is the closest most appropriate provision, so it can be difficult to challenge the placement and need for travel support retrospectively. This is particularly challenging for children accessing out of borough provisions such as other Further Education Colleges. Furthermore, it does not take account that some children attending specialist provisions at Post 16, or those in receipt of high needs funding, may now be able to travel more independently (or could do with some travel training) as they develop and prepare for adulthood.
- 3.9 MKCC officers from a range of service areas have formed a ‘Post 16 working group’ to review the options in relation to policy changes, prior to making recommendations to appropriate internal governance boards, and any public consultation and political decision required. These options are list below and set out in Annex 1 for further clarity:
- 3.9.1 **Greater clarification of what would be considered as the ‘nearest suitable school’.** Based on wording used by other local authorities, an example of this which could reduce the cost of supporting access to out of area placements could be...

Those aged 16-18 will *only* receive ‘free’ school travel support if they attend the nearest, suitable education setting as **defined/confirmed by MKCC***. Applications made to other education settings (regardless of any requests for consultations from the setting to MKCC) will be deemed as ‘parental preference’, so the parent/carer will be responsible for ensuring the young person can access.

**Course content at Further Education locations will only be considered in relation to the main qualification and not vocational elements.*

- 3.9.2 **Prioritising support for those with the highest levels of need and the lowest income.** Transport support could be restricted to those who meet the criteria below and are also in receipt of the highest amount of Working Tax Credit, as

per the Extended Rights criteria. e.g. based on wording used by other local authorities a definition could be added to the policy statement to say –

Transport will only be considered if the setting is over 3 miles from the home or if the child has the below defined in their EHCP -

- *Long term severely restricted independent mobility, due to a physical disability.*
- *Long term severely restricted independent mobility due to a medical condition resulting in severe persistent pain and/or extreme fatigue.*
- *A sensory impairment resulting in severely restricted mobility.*
- *Severe behavioural emotional and/or social difficulties in comparison with other children of their age. This may be linked with cognitive ability or be as a result of a specific development disorder.*

3.9.3 Ensuring the cheapest most appropriate support option is offered to the family by default. Mileage or Family Led Travel Budgets (FLT) could be offered as a default which would reduce the number of contracts MKCC directly commissions for shared vehicles. Mileage and FLT are much cheaper options than shared.

Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There would be an increase to the number of vehicles going to each school and some are already struggling with space (particularly at Slated Row, Redway, and White Spire) • Could disproportionately impact the sustainability of some of our transport providers that specialise in providing this type of transport for children with SEND.
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential saving could be in the region of c.£400k assuming similar numbers to now, and all Post 16 children receiving Travel Support were given an FLT. This could increase further if people all received mileage. • Families have greater ownership and control in relation to their travel arrangements. • Ensure parity across all children.

3.9.4 Ensuring the cheapest most appropriate support option is offered to the family by default but allowing for MKCC discretion. Like the option above the default offer could be that Mileage or Family Led Travel Budgets are given unless the local authority determines another option is more appropriate. For instance, where it is cheaper/environmentally beneficial for the local authority to add to existing shared vehicles (such as at special schools where lots of other children are attending). This would reduce the need to put on commissioned vehicles to Milton Keynes College.

Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There could be challenge/complaints from families who have previously had commissioned transport to their previous school.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents could challenge the perceived inequity for children accessing different provisions.
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential saving could be in the region of c.£75k, assuming similar numbers to now, and the shared routes to MK Special Schools continued, but FLT/Mileage offered to eligible children accessing any other destinations Those with the highest level of need will continue to get the highest level of support. Some families will have greater ownership and control in relation to their travel arrangements. Supports preparation for adulthood by encouraging independence.

3.9.5 Families could be required to pay towards the cost of transport which is directly commissioned by MKCC. Currently there are 144 Post 16 children that travel on shared transport directly commissioned by MKCC. We currently offer a Privilege Fare scheme for Post 16 children without EHCPs who live in rural areas and access a mainstream school to ‘purchase a seat’ on a shared vehicle (whilst available) to assist them with accessing school. Currently a seat costs £558.60 per academic year. A similar policy could be applied to passengers under the 6th Form duty to add a charge as the legislation ‘gives local authorities the flexibility to ‘contribute to, fund or charge for other transport solutions where it wishes’. This could be applied purely to those on shared transport, or more broadly as a requirement to pay the first £558.60 on all travel support options. It appears many local authorities already do this. This requirement could be waived for families on low income.

Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families are unlikely to want to contribute towards the cost of travel. If families do not pay, and arrange their own transport, this could increase the number vehicles going to schools who have limited space. If families do not pay and the number of contracts reduces, provider sustainability could be impacted.
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would generate c.£80K per year towards the cost of delivering school travel support, assuming the current number of 144 post 16 children remains similar in the future, and a contribution of £558.60 for those using transport directly commissioned by MKCC. If families chose to make their own arrangements instead of paying, the number of contracts could be reduced, and this will reduce the overall cost.

3.9.6 Focus on Travel Training for young people with SEND. This could be explored further by working with special schools, and specialist units of mainstream

schools, to identify young people that would benefit from independent travel training to reduce the need for more expensive travel support options. This would also empower young people to be more independent and support their preparations for adulthood. This has been trialled previously in Milton Keynes but stopped during Covid. There is currently very limited resource within MKCC to deliver this, so consideration would need to be given to alternative delivery options. The time required to progress and deliver this means it would be unlikely to deliver savings for 2025/6 but could help to deliver savings beyond that time.

4. Further actions and timescales

- 4.1 The policy statement needs to be published by May 31st, 2025, therefore any changes that would require a consultation or Delegated Decision would need to be fully completed beforehand, but the considerations of the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee would be welcomed as next steps are progressed.

List of background papers

Annex A – Options Currently Identified

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Annex A – Options Currently Identified

	Current Position	Potential Change	Benefits	Risks
1	<p>'Nearest suitable school' is ambiguous under the current policy and leads to conflict and challenge regarding the similar courses that appear to be available locally.</p>	<p>Greater clarification of what is considered the 'nearest suitable school', with a focus on ensuring the provision is agreed and confirmed by MKCC SEND Service from the outset.</p> <p>Based on wording used by other local authorities, an example of this which could reduce the cost of supporting access to out of area placements could be...</p> <p>Those aged 16-18 will <i>only</i> receive 'free' school travel support if they <i>attend the nearest, suitable education setting as defined/confirmed by MKCC*</i>. Applications made to other education settings (regardless of any requests for consultations from the setting to MKCC) will be deemed as 'parental preference', so the parent/carer will be responsible for ensuring the young person can access.</p> <p><i>*Course content at Further Education Locations will only be considered in relation to the <u>main qualification</u> and not vocational elements.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in travel support costs • Ensures there is clarity that without this, any application will be considered 'parental preference', meaning the parent is responsible for ensuring access. • Encourages families to consider of local provision. • Clarity from the outset of whether there are comparable provisions and courses available in MK. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult conversations/complaints/tribunals. • Potential to impact on MKCC SEND Service Resource
2	<p>The definition of who is eligible under 'SEN' criteria for post 16 transport is unclear, and decisions are usually based on previous arrangements which may no longer be appropriate.</p>	<p>Greater clarification of what is considered the 'SEN passenger', with a focus on ensuring this is agreed and confirmed by MKCC SEND Service from the outset.</p> <p>Transport support could be restricted to those who meet the criteria below and are also in receipt of the highest amount of Working Tax Credit, as per the Extended Rights criteria. e.g. based on wording used by other local</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in travel support costs • Ensures there is clarity that without this, any application will be considered 'Non-SEN', meaning the parent is responsible for ensuring access. • Support is prioritised for those with the highest level of need and the lowest income. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult conversations/complaints/tribunals. • Potential to impact on MKCC SEND Service Resource

Annex A – Options Currently Identified

		<p>authorities a definition could be added to the policy statement to say...</p> <p><i>Transport will only be considered if the setting is over 3 miles from the home or if the child has the below <u>defined</u> in their EHCP -</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Long term severely restricted independent mobility, due to a physical disability;</i> • <i>Long term severely restricted independent mobility due to a medical condition resulting in severe persistent pain and/or extreme fatigue;</i> • <i>A sensory impairment resulting in severely restricted mobility;</i> • <i>Severe behavioural emotional and/or social difficulties in comparison with other children of their age. This may be linked with cognitive ability or be as a result of a specific development disorder.</i> 		
3	<p>Post 16 children are currently assessed with all transport options available, including commissioned which is the most expensive.</p>	<p>Only provide support by way of Mileage and FLTB as they are typically significantly cheaper per academic year</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential saving could be in the region of c.£400k assuming similar numbers to now, and all Post 16 children receiving Travel Support were given an FLTB. This could increase further if people all received mileage. • Families have greater ownership and control in relation to their travel arrangements. • Ensure parity across all children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There would be an increase to the number of vehicles going to each school and some are already struggling with space (particularly at Slated Row, Redway, and White Spire) • Could disproportionately impact the sustainability of some of our transport providers that specialise in providing this type of transport for children with SEND.
4	<p>As per above.</p>	<p>Like the option above the default offer could be that Mileage or Family Led Travel Budgets are given unless the local authority determines another option is more appropriate. For instance, where it is</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential saving could be in the region of c.£75k, assuming similar numbers to now, and the shared routes to MK Special Schools continued but 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There could be push back/complaints from families who have had commissioned transport for previous school travel.

Annex A – Options Currently Identified

		cheaper/environmentally beneficial for the local authority to add to existing shared vehicles (such as at special schools where lots of other children are attending). This would reduce the need to put on commissioned vehicles to Milton Keynes College.	<p>FLTB/Mileage was offered to eligible children accessing any other destinations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those with the highest level of need will continue to get the highest level of support. • Some families will have greater ownership and control in relation to their travel arrangements. • Supports preparation for adulthood by encouraging independence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents could challenge the lack of parity for children accessing different provisions.
5	Post 16 SEN passengers currently do not contribute towards the cost of their transport.	<p>Introduce a discretionary contribution for those on commissioned vehicles, or all travel support options, at the same rate as the current Privilege Fare applied to mainstream post 16 passengers using MKCC commissioned coaches. This requirement could be waived for families on low income.</p> <p>It appears many local authorities already do this.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would generate c.£80K per year towards the cost of delivering school travel support, assuming the current number of 144 post 16 children remains similar in the future, and a contribution of £558.60. • If families do not pay, the number of contracts could be reduced and this will reduce the overall cost. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political push back to introduce the charge • Complaints from families • If families do not pay, and arrange their own transport, this could increase the number vehicles going to schools who have limited space. • If families do not pay and the number of contracts reduces, provider sustainability could be impacted. Especially for London Hire and Ladybirds.
6	Travel training stopped during covid, and there is currently limited resource within MKCC to deliver this.	Focus on Travel Training for young people with SEND. This could be explored by working with special schools and specialist units of mainstream schools to identify children who would benefit in order to reduce the cost of travel support required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would help to reduce the cost of support required. • Supports independence and preparation for adulthood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited resource available in MKCC to deliver • Would be unlikely to deliver savings for 2025/6, but could support delivery of savings beyond this.

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**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WORK PROGRAMME**

ROUND 1			
DATE	PROPOSED AGENDA ITEMS	COMMENTS	REPORT DEADLINES (MIDDAY)
11 Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to MKCC Children’s Services • ILACS and Ofsted SEND inspection update • Youth Justice and Support Service 		Monday 2 September
ROUND 2			
10 Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place Planning – Including falling PAN, and planning in new developments. • Education Outcomes Update • Early Years Targeted work 		Thursday 28 November
ROUND 3			
5 Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers • Ofsted Inspection Update & Action Plans • Locality Based Working – Schools as Community Spaces • 2024 Attainment Data – Information Item 		Monday 27 January
ROUND 4			
13 Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post 16 Provision in Milton Keynes • Withdrawing post 16 SEND travel support - Impact assessment, Management and Communication • National SEND Reforms and MK Preparations • For Information only - EHCP’s with Local and National Context 		Tuesday 4 March

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2025-26

ROUND 1			
PROVISIONAL DATE	PROPOSED AGENDA ITEMS	COMMENTS	REPORT DEADLINES (MIDDAY)
25 Jun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Poverty • For Information only – Family Centre Approach 		Monday 16 June
ROUND 2			
10 Sep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Placements 		Monday 1 September
ROUND 3			
11 Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifelong Learning 		Friday 31 October
ROUND 4			
4 Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand Management 		Monday 26 January

For Information

EHCs: Local and National Context.

	Date	13 March 2025
	Author	Victoria Courtis, Head of SEND
	Sponsor	Mac Heath, Director of Children’s Services

Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to advise the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee on our current progress on completing assessments for those children and young people who may have a special educational need or disability, in comparison to the national position.

Through the SEND2 data return and census every Local Authority is expected to upload specific data so a national average can be shared. This enables us to monitor how we compare to national data.

Below outlines both the national and local data comparisons linked to Education, Health and Social Care plans (EHCs), broken into the following data sets:

- Number of EHC needs assessment requests
- Number of EHCs
- Number of EHCs finalised within the 20-week legal timeframe

Number of EHC Needs Assessment Requests

	2022	2023	2024
MK	553	760	848
National	114,482	138,242	DATA NOT AVAILBLE

Nationally from 2022 to 2023 there was a rise of 20.8% in the number of requests for an EHC needs assessment. In Milton Keynes, there was a rise of 37% which is 16% higher than national. The national data for 2024 has not been published yet, however, Milton Keynes is showing a 12% increase from 2023 to 2024.

Number of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

Data gathered for national from January census

	2023	2024
MK	2642	2860
National	517,048	576,474

Nationally there was a 11% increase in the number of EHCPs recorded through the census. This number is set to increase year on year as a trend. In Milton Keynes, we saw an 8% increase in number of EHCPs which is just below national.

Number of EHCPs finalised within 20-week legal timeframe

	2022	2023	2024
MK	87%	65%	44%
National	49.2%	50.3%	Data not available

Milton Keynes has, for the previous two years, performed higher than national in the completion of EHC needs assessments within 20 weeks. The percentage rate has dropped across the country this year due to the ongoing challenge of the recruitment of Educational Psychologists to carry out that part of the assessment, alongside the impact of such a significant increase in demand. There have been two commissioned projects to help address this locally and it is projected that by July 2025 we will have addressed a significant number of the current challenges, through the additional investment received, and we will see the percentage start to increase again. We look forward to understanding what the national reported average is for completion for 2024, but we are confident that we continue to sit above the national average as other Local Authorities also have this as a key area of concern with a call that this is considered within the SEND Reforms.