

**Stockton on Tees Borough Council – Decisions taken by the Cabinet on Thursday 17 September 2026**

| Agenda Item No | Topic                                                                           | Decision                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| A7             | SEND Reform Programme – Education White Paper and Local Area Reform Plan Update | <p align="center"><b><u>STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL</u></b></p> <p align="center"><b><u>CABINET DECISION</u></b></p> <p align="center"><b><u>PROFORMA</u></b></p> <p>Cabinet Meeting ..... 17 September 2026</p> <p>1.     <u>Title of Item/Report</u></p> <p>SEND Reform Programme – Education White Paper and Local Area Reform Plan Update</p> <p>2.     <u>Record of the Decision</u></p> <p>Cabinet received a report that report updated Cabinet on the national SEND Reform Programme and Stockton-on-Tees' Local Area Reform Plan (LARP), developed jointly with the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board and submitted to the Department for Education in June 2026.</p> <p>The LARP focused on stronger mainstream inclusion, earlier identification and intervention, increased local sufficiency, reduced reliance on independent provision, improved Alternative Provision pathways and stronger partnership governance. The Council was awaiting the DfE assessment, expected in October 2026. Approval could result in High Needs Stability Funding of around £15.4m, approximately 90% of the £17.13m cumulative DSG High Needs deficit.</p> <p>The report also proposed the use of the Council's £8.01m available High Needs capital resources for three schemes: a new 50-place SEMH school, expansion of the Early Support Nursery by up to 10 places, and 40 additional specialist</p> |

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|                |       | <p>primary places at Ash Trees Academy, together with programme contingency and associated delegations.</p> <p>At the meeting, an addendum to the report was circulated detailing two additional recommendations. This added authority for the Director of Children's Services to act as the Council's authorised representative in Spark of Genius LLP in connection with the SEMH Special School, and delegated authority for contract awards and subsequent contract decisions required to deliver that project.</p> <p>RESOLVED that:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the closure of the national SEND Reform consultation and the submission of the Local Area Reform Plan to the Department for Education, be noted.</li> <li>2. It be noted that Council and the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board were awaiting the outcome of the assessment process, expected in October 2026.</li> <li>3. the significant financial implications of approval of the Local Area Reform Plan, including the potential write-off of approximately 90% of the cumulative DSG High Needs deficit, be noted</li> <li>4. the continued delivery of the SEND Reform Programme and associated transformation activity set out within the Local Area Reform Plan be endorsed.</li> </ol> |

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|                |       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. the investment of up to £2m of capital funding, to create a new 50 place SEMH school, be agreed. This was to undertake necessary building work to adapt and expand an older building to create the required places.</li> <li>6. the investment of £1.4m of capital funding to expand the existing Early Support Nursery to create up to 10 extra spaces, be agreed. This was to undertake necessary building work to adapt the existing provision to create the required places.</li> <li>7. the investment of £3.75m of capital funding to expand the Ash Trees Academy Special School in building onto the Sandown Road site to create up to 40 additional specialist primary spaces, be agreed. This was to undertake necessary building work to adapt the existing provision to create the required places.</li> <li>8. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, to take all necessary steps to deliver the projects within the approved budgets.</li> <li>9. Delegated authority to the transfer of budget caused by cost variations within the approved programme be given to the Section 151 Officer and the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and Transport and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.</li> <li>10. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Children's Services,</li> </ol> |

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|                |       | <p>in consultation with the S151 officer and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, to allocate the contingency of £860,000 if required within the three schemes, within the approved programme.</p> <p>11. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Director or Corporate Services to award the construction contract to deliver recommendation 1 to a value of £1.7m including variation, annual inflationary uplifts (where allowed in the contract terms and conditions) and extension decision.</p> <p>12. the Director of Children's Services be appointed as the Council's authorised representative for the purposes of exercising the Council's rights as a Member of Spark of Genius LLP in relation to the SEMH Special School project and associated matters, including attendance at, participation in and voting at Members' meetings of the LLP.</p> <p>13. authority be delegated to the relevant Director or Assistant Director to make the specific contract award decision and any subsequent contract variation, annual inflationary uplifts (where allowed in the contract terms and conditions) and extension decision in respect of all contracts required to deliver the SEMH Special School project approved by the report.</p> <p>3. <u>Reasons for the Decision</u></p> <p>The SEND Reform Programme has substantial service and financial</p> |

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|                |       | <p>implications. The capital investments are integral to increasing local specialist capacity, reducing reliance on higher-cost independent placements and delivering the LARP, while Cabinet approval is required because of the level of expenditure.</p> <p>4. <u>Alternative Options Considered and Rejected</u></p> <p>None</p> <p>5. <u>Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest</u></p> <p>None</p> <p>6. <u>Details of any Dispensations</u></p> <p>None</p> <p>7. <u>Date and Time by which Call In must be executed</u></p> <p>Midnight on Friday 25 September 2026</p> <p>Proper Officer</p> |