Implementing the Local SEND Reform Plan

Progress so far

Herefordshire’s SEND Reform Plan was submitted on 19th June.

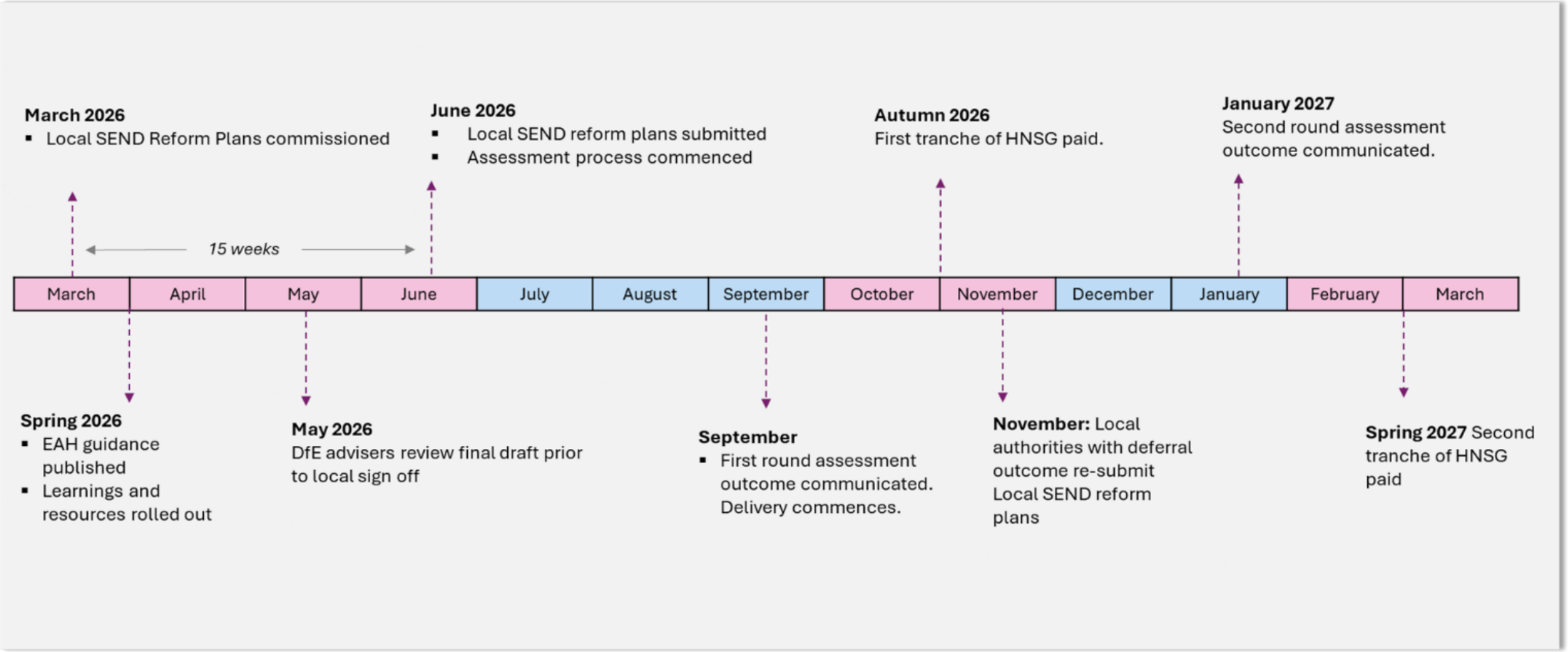
Co-produced with partners

Link to Funding (High Needs Stability Grant) - Government will cover 90% of High Needs deficits (up to end of 2025–26). Funding is conditional on plan approval

Plans will be assessed using the Local SEND Reform Plan Quality Assessment Framework

The Secretary of State makes the final decision on approval Outcomes will be communicated in September

Timeline


March 2026
Local SEND Reform Plans commissioned
June 2026
Local SEND reform plans submitted
Assessment process commenced
Autumn 2026
First tranche of HNSG paid.
January 2027
Second round assessment outcome communicated.
15 weeks
March
April
May
June
July
August
September
October
November
December
January
February
March
Spring 2026
EAH guidance published
Learnings and resources rolled out
May 2026
DfE advisers review final draft prior to local sign off
September
First round assessment outcome communicated. Delivery commences.
November: Local authorities with deferral outcome re-submit Local SEND reform plans
Spring 2027 Second tranche of HNSG paid

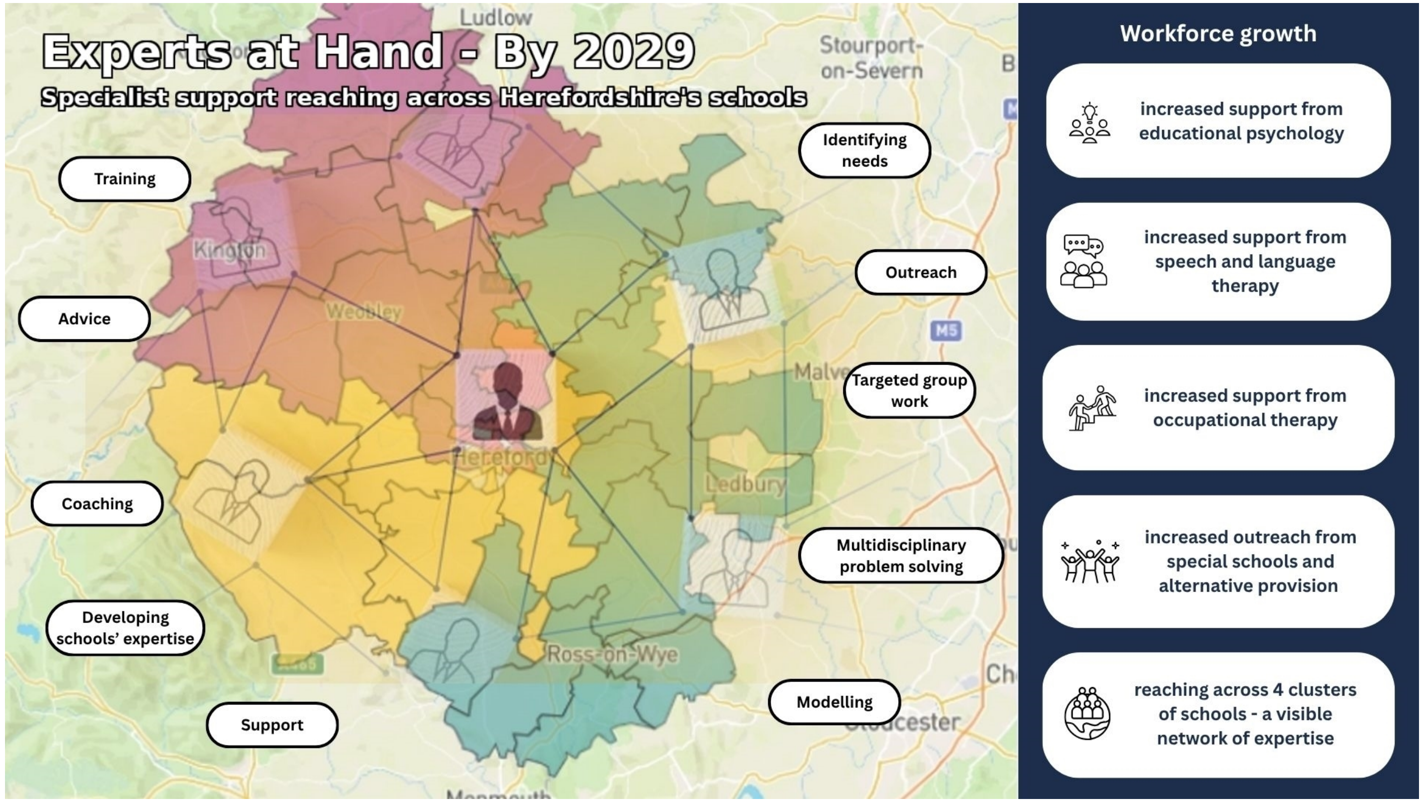
High Needs Stability Grant and Deficit Management

- The High Needs Stability Grant is a UK government funding measure designed to help local authorities manage and write off 90% of their accumulated high needs deficits.
- The grant writes off 90% of a local authority's total eligible high needs deficit accumulated up to the end of the 2025/26 financial year.
- Remaining Deficit: Councils are responsible for addressing the remaining 10% through localised sustainability plans.
- Statutory Override: The government has extended the statutory override, ensuring these DSG deficits remain separated from councils' general fund balances.
- Eligibility Conditions: To receive the grant funding, local authorities must meet strict requirements:
  - SEND Reform Plan: Councils must develop and secure Department for Education (DfE) approval for a local SEND reform plan.
  - Sustainable Spending: The plan must demonstrate a sustainable, actionable path forward that manages future high needs spending effectively.

Headlines 2026-2029

- The local plan aims to create a clearer, earlier and more joined-up support system for children and young people with SEND.
- Implementation over 3 years to 2029
- Year one is the build year: establish the operating model, meet minimum requirements, and start delivery in two pilot clusters.
- Years 2 and 3 then scale and embed the model across the county.
- Year 1 funding confirmed: £1.2m (Sept – March)
- Year 2 indicative funding : £2.1m (full year)
- Year 3 indicative funding: £2.4m (full year)
- Funding = 80% minimum direct delivery to schools

Three Year Roadmap



- Year One – Build:
  - Publish one joined-up inclusion offer.
  - Start Experts at Hand in 2 pilot clusters.
  - Set up single front door, triage and shared reporting.
- Year Two – Scale up:
  - Begin to extend core model to all clusters.
  - Reduce local variation and standardise access.
  - Use Year 1 learning to improve consistency, reach and quality
- Year Three: Enabled:
  - Full county coverage.
  - Make earlier specialist advice and outreach routine.
  - Show impact on inclusion, local placements and value for money.

What schools will see in Year One

- A published local inclusion offer that explains what support is available and how to access it.
- A new SEND portal for schools
- Access to an assistive technology lending library
- One route in for Experts at Hand with clearer thresholds and triage.
- A better explanation of what schools can get directly and what still sits with NHS pathways.
- More early specialist input: educational psychology, speech and language, occupational therapy, inclusion advice and outreach.
- Two pilot clusters where the new approach goes live first.
- Regular feedback loops through headteacher groups, SENCO networks, roadshows and “you said, we did” updates.

Sufficiency, Places and Financial Sustainability

Inclusion and Sufficiency Planning

Inclusion is the default approach, expanding bases and adapting mainstream settings for diverse local needs.

Reducing High-Cost Placements

Focus on reducing costly out-of-area placements by investing in local specialist capacity and early interventions.

Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability guides all decisions, emphasising long-term stability over short-term demand management.

Leadership and Reinvestment

Collective leadership and reinvestment of savings upstream are essential for sustainable improvement.

Use of capital funding

SEND commissioned places in mainstream schools:

- SEMH intervention
- ASD and SLCN resourced provision places

Growth in special school capacity

- Special school rebuild
- New special school development
- Special school expansion/ improvement

Alternative Provision

- Relocation and expansion

The capital programme will improve the whole local offer. It should mean better access to local support, more realistic pathways when children need something different, and less dependence on placements far from home.

What This Means for Leaders

- Brief SENCOs and governors on the pilot model and the direction of travel.
- Work with Experts at Hand when the service is launched
- Identify where staff need the most help with coaching, outreach or practical advice.
- Use / join forums and networks to shape the model and flag what is not yet working clearly.