



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel - 10 April 2025

Additional Learning Needs Reform Update

Purpose	To update the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel on the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Inclusion Strategy 2022-2027
Content	Update on the progress made towards the ALN Strategy 2022-2027
Councillors are being asked to	Consider the information provided
Lead Councillor	Councillor Robert Smith, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning
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1. Background

- 1.1 The Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion team (ALNIT) currently sits within the Vulnerable Learners Service and provides a statutory service, prescribed by the Education Act 1996, the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (ALNET) Act 2018, Additional Learning Needs Code 2021 for Wales and regulations.
- 1.2 The ALNET Act 2018 replaced the SEN Code of Practice 2002 through a phased implementation that began in September 2021. The legal frameworks inform the work of ALNIT and other key stakeholders such as educational settings and the Local Health Board (LHB).
- 1.3 The ALNET Act aims to improve the planning and delivery of support for learners from 0-25 with additional learning needs (ALN) by adopting a more person-centred approach to planning and delivery of support to meet the needs of children and young people.
- 1.4 In 2019, an ALN Strategy was developed for Swansea to outline the transformation programme required to implement the ALNET Act successfully between 2019-2022. This was developed with key strategic partners and overseen by the ALN Strategic Board. The strategic board's membership

includes headteachers, councillors, FEI colleagues, local health board colleagues, DECLO, Social Services and the early years sector.

- 1.5 This strategy is now completed and a new strategy (2022-2027) was developed to support full implementation and embedding of the reform.

2. Current Strategy

- 2.1 The ALN Strategy 2022-2027 covers the following priority areas:

- Schools
- Post 16
- Collaboration
- Early Years

- 2.2 As detailed above, the strategy is overseen by the ALN Strategic Board and in addition key elements are part of Swansea Council's transformational programmes.

These are specifically:

- Transforming Additional Learning Needs - delivering the ALNET Strategy 2022-2027, which builds upon and embeds the transformational work outlined in the ALN Implementation Plan 2019-2022.
- Supporting Sufficient Specialist Places to meet current and future demand as a result of ALN reform and legislation.

Updates are provided quarterly to the Transformational Board and an annual report is presented to the Cabinet.

- 2.3 In order to provide an update to the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel on progress towards Additional Learning Needs reform this report provides updates on the four priority areas of the strategy with reference made to the transformational programmes within these priorities.

3. Schools

3.1 Overview

- The transformational project Supporting Sufficient Specialist Places (SSSP) allows the LA to quality assure provision at all stages of a graduated response model, ensuring consistent offers are available to all learners, whichever school or Speciality Teaching Facility they attend.
- A significant level of work has been undertaken with schools to develop the workforce to be equipped to deliver the ALNET transformation. This includes accredited training modules so that staff in schools have sufficient skills to identify and plan for meeting the needs of ALN learners.
- There is continued focus for schools on quality assurance to ensure that there is a consistent approach to ALN provision across Swansea. This

has included specific focus on universal and enhanced provision with guidance documents produced.

- Moderation exercises have taken place to support staff develop a consistent quality of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) across the LA, as well as the development of provision maps to outline universal, targeted and specialist provision on offer across the LA. Moderation exercises have evidenced there is still further work to be done to ensure consistent approaches but engagement is high and good support is in place.
- Closer links, and training have been established for the School Improvement Team on ALN provision to support school improvement advisors in their evaluation of effective school leadership in relation to ALN provision.

3.2 Supporting Sufficient Specialist Places

- ALNIT with support from the School Funding and Information Team have delivered against expected timelines for a phased implementation of specialist teaching facility (STFs) review between 2025-2028.
- A full statutory consultation (prescribed in the school organisation code) has been completed with a public consultation, post consultation statutory notice and closure of official objection period.
- Consultation meetings were held in the autumn term of 2024. Over 50 consultation meetings took place with 160 total respondents.
- Every school with a significant change received comprehensive suite of on-site consultation meetings with pupils, parents, staff, governors.
- Trade unions were updated in relation to proposals.
- Public meetings held in person and online.
- A report was submitted to Cabinet with findings of consultation and recommendations the future model
- No official objections were submitted and in March 2025 Swansea Cabinet agreed to proceed with the proposals
- Detailed plans for each component have been worked up with priority schools identified for change from 1 September 2025.
- The likelihood of improving quality of provision is also high with new memoranda of understanding planned as new and existing STFs are implemented afresh.

3.3 ALN Capital Grant

- Effective use of ALN capital grant means increasing numbers of schools have future proofed spaces for ALN and the newly proposed STFs will have appropriate learning environments.

3.4 Cluster Enhanced Provision (part of SSSP programme)

- Innovative pilots are under way such as enhanced provision at Townhill Primary School for the Dylan Thomas cluster and at YGG Bryniago. As a result, learners needs have been met well, including through the medium of Welsh.

- Positive feedback from schools involved and parents of the pupils, some noting an improvement in behaviour, attention / concentration levels at home too.
- Pilot to run for a further 12 months (grant funded).

3.5 Welsh medium provision

The proposals for the STF review prioritise Welsh Medium education with proposals for the first primary STF to be opened in Swansea in September 2025.

As detailed above, a Welsh medium Cluster Enhanced Provision (Canolfan Iago) has also been set up for Welsh Medium pupils within the Gŵyr Cluster Primary Schools. This model was set up in anticipation of a Welsh Medium Specialist Teaching Facility (if approved) from September 2025. It has enabled staff to be supported to acquire the require specialism, to assess the need and appropriate responses for children in the sector and to achieve an important milestone in Welsh Medium education.

Welsh medium places will also be extended in the secondary sector, and the next steps are to identify a physical base to offer the same support to primary learners in the Bryn Tawe cluster.

3.6 Tribunals

- In the 2 years from January 2023 there have been 25 appeals to the Education Tribunal for Wales. The number of appeals in Swansea is low compared to the rest of Wales and given the size of the authority.
- Of the appeals, only one claim was upheld. 24 cases were either withdrawn by the claimant or the appeals were dismissed (i.e. favourable to the LA).
- Success of defending ALN tribunals is significant with a good record of recent outcomes favouring the local authority's provision via mainstream schools and specialist settings
- The position of ALNIT is that we want to focus our resource and expertise on providing the very best education offer for local children close to home as possible in our own, quality assured provision. While we recognise this is not always possible, working in partnership with families is a priority to avoid dispute wherever possible.
- We have an effective caseworker team who work in partnership with families.

3.7 Workforce succession planning

- Effective succession planning is supporting recruitment and enabling us to attract skilled professionals in critical areas of the workforce e.g. the Educational Psychology and specialist teacher teams.

4. Post 16

- Welsh Government will devolve funding for Post 16 places in Independent Specialist Post 16 Institutions (ISPIs) in September 2025. To date Swansea is seen as a model of good practice in terms of the breadth of Post 16 offer and so the local authority is likely to benefit from the new arrangements. However, any potential benefit needs to be considered in the context of increasing costs across all independent placements and parental demand, so strengthening our local offer remains a priority.
- Officers are working on a post 16 guidance document which will explain the options available to post 16 ALN learners, as well as providing information and signposting for young people. This will include information about further education (ALN) courses (including independent living skills) as well as opportunities offered by third sector agencies.
- Officers meet with colleagues across Wales to discuss post 16 provision, share experiences / challenges and seek to problem solve.
- There is positive collaborative working between the local authority and Gower college Swansea.

5. Collaboration

- The Local Health Board have invited Heads of Service from both Swansea and Neath Port Talbot to sit on their ALN strategic board and this has provided a helpful approach to navigating the ALNET Act and ALN Code for Wales through collaborative working.
- ALN officers continue to link with the Health Board to review the current Speech and Language Service Level Agreement. There is a history of the local authority funding work in the health board which should now fall within the board's statutory responsibility. However, recognising the significant challenges that the NHS has faced in the last few years it is acknowledged that this needs careful review and consideration to phase out old arrangements and implement new plans.
- Closer links with the Health Boards paediatric occupational health services has resulted in a recent pilot project to support mainstream schools. A similar project was rolled out in Neath Port Talbot some years ago, the success of which has been recognised by Welsh Government.
- Continued discussions with the health board has resulted in a review of the referral process into the Neuro Developmental (ND) Assessment Pathway which should provide benefits in terms of an improved referral mechanism. In Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. The Local Health Board have outsourced an element of their waiting lists (currently 29 months) in order to address the growing demand.
- The Head of Vulnerable Learners Service sits on the regional Autism strategy group and is working in partnership to consider solutions to provide pre diagnosis support. The group has a key focus to prevent both escalation to the ND waiting list and also reduce waiting times. A joint venture between Swansea and Neath Port Talbot (Myth Busting) funded via the Regional Partnership Board has gone some way to achieve this.

5.1 **Myth Busting**

The Myth Busting Project aims to raise awareness and dispel common misconceptions about conditions like Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This initiative is a collaborative effort between the Swansea ALN Inclusion Team and the Neath Port Talbot Inclusion Team, funded by the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board.

The project includes digital and printed resources for schools and parents, providing accurate information about neurodevelopmental conditions.

A short animation explains the support available at home, school, and in the community, regardless of whether a formal diagnosis has been received and is available on Swansea Council Website.

Clips from the animation are displayed electronically in central bus stations and car parks and shared via social media channels.

The project intends to raise awareness about neurodevelopmental conditions. The target audience is parents, carers, and the community. It advocates a needs-led approach to supporting neurodiversity in line with national thinking and is also intended to empower Individuals by providing tools and resources to help individuals and families manage neurodevelopmental conditions effectively.

5.2 **Occupational Therapy Projects**

The Additional Learning Needs Inclusion Team have commissioned two key Occupational Therapy projects which have been highly successful and well received by schools. Both projects have been grant funded via ALN Grant during 24-25 and are expected to be extended into the next financial year.

The first project, delivered by Sensory Wellbeing Occupational Therapist has targeted Specialist Teaching Facility staff and helped them to understand sensory processing, sensory dysregulation and importantly how to manage need. This has been delivered by a series of 'in person' training events where staff were supported to understand the need and apply a range of strategies and activities in their settings. This project also supported a small number of STF classes at a school-based level and provide advice and guidance for a small number of individuals.

The second project, commissioned through the Local Health Board (SBUHB) focused on supporting mainstream schools via online training (Zones of regulation and Sensory Circuits), bookable consultation slots to discuss individual learners (online) and a pilot of four schools working at a school-based level to support needs. It has also provided advice and guidance in relation to Developmental Co-ordination Disorder and practical advice on handwriting.

6. Early Years

- There has been significant growth in the demand for ALN support in the Early Years cohort. Originally the ALNIT structure only included the statutory Early Years ALNCO post but it has become clear that due to increasing demand that there is insufficient resource to effectively meet our obligations in relation to this cohort.
- As a consequence, a review of ALN Early Years funding and processes was undertaken and a new model of delivery will be implemented from April 2025 which will enhance the offer and ensure we are better able to meet the increasing need to support children with ALN in their early years settings and as the transition to schools.
- To date there is continued support provided for early years settings, including training, advice, and information. Training needs are identified through liaison with the settings and delivered flexibly to meet the needs of the settings.
- Specialist staff are available for regular question and answer sessions to provide support to practitioners.
- Moderation of Early Years IDPs takes place to ensure that there is a consistency of person-centred practice and IDP development.
- Information sharing between schools and early years providers is developing with a focus on transition in place.
- Early Years process pathways are regularly monitored to ensure they continue to meet demand across the service.
- Early Years staff currently employed by Commissioning & Resources (currently overseen by Jane Whitmore) will transfer to the ALN Early Years team in April 2025. It is anticipated that this will provide a joined-up approach to supporting pre-school children.
- Grant funding in 2025/2026 has been identified will provide opportunities to strengthen to offer and implement more proactive, preventative approaches in line with the current offer.
- This will be an important area for focus and development in the next year.

7. Conclusion

- There is good delivery in better provision to support schools with learners experiencing barriers to learning.
- Improved planning and delivery of support for learners from 0 to 25 with ALN is embedding well.
- Early identification of needs and putting in place timely and effective interventions has progressed well with schools developing more inclusive practice, for example ASD friendly, early and embedded speech, language and communication strategies
- The strategy is progressing well however there are still challenges in relation to demand, funding and capacity.
- While tribunal outcomes in Swansea are favourable, nationally they reflect an interpretation of the legislation which is operationally challenging to deliver. We retain a commitment to child centred approaches and high quality LA maintained offers which best meet the needs of the child and attribute our successful tribunal defence to that ethos alongside a

commitment to working in partnership with parents and carers. However, the tension between policy and practice is increasingly challenging.

- Welsh Government is actively reviewing the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET). Officers are actively contributing to this review to highlight some of the operational challenges. The most significant being the underfunding of the statutory obligations and the tension between policy and practice.

8. Legal implications

8.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

9. Finance Implications

9.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

10. Integrated Assessment Implications

10.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

10.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

10.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

10.2 As this is an information report to Scrutiny an IIA is not required.