HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

21 September 2026

Dear Chief Executive,

BCP SEND Reform Plan 2026–2029

I am writing to confirm my support for the Plan overall. I have some concerns about elements of the proposals and, in particular, about how delivery, accountability and progress will be tracked over the coming years. However, I believe it is right to support the Plan because it moves SEND provision closer to the Government's objectives of earlier intervention, more inclusive support and better outcomes for children and young people.

I welcome the substantial additional investment being made available to Bournemouth East and the decision to write off 90% of councils' historic SEND deficits accumulated on Dedicated Schools Grant accounts up to the end of 2025–26. The arrangement accepted by BCP Council will result in the write-off of approximately £165 million of BCP's historic SEND deficit. The scale of the historic deficit reflects the pressures that have developed across the system, with demand for EHCPs and specialist provision increasing substantially. This is why reform is important and, regrettably, was not pursued under the last Conservative Government.

Supporting families and children with SEND

Through my SEND roundtables with parents, carers, teachers and professionals, I have heard first-hand about the exhaustion families experience, the difficulties they face in securing appropriate support, concerns about underfunding and the frustration caused by a system that can feel adversarial. I have raised these concerns directly with Ministers and welcome the Government's wider reforms to strengthen support for children and families.

I have reviewed the discussion at the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 September and subsequently met Councillor Sharon Carr-Brown, Chair of the Committee, on 18 September. I was encouraged by the shared commitment to securing the best possible outcomes for children and young people with additional needs.

There is a clear opportunity to build a system that is fairer, more sustainable and more responsive to the needs of families across Bournemouth East and the wider BCP area.

In particular, I believe the Reform Plan should:

- Maintain and strengthen the trust of families
- Demonstrate meaningful and ongoing co-production with parents and carers
- Support mainstream schools and address workforce recruitment and retention
- Ensure effective transitions for children and young people
- Provide equality of access and provision across schools
- Establish transparent and meaningful performance monitoring

Above all, the reforms must remain child-centred rather than finance-led.

Strengthening delivery and accountability

The management and delivery of the Reform Plan will be critical. I recognise that BCP and local schools have increasingly been moving towards many of the principles underpinning the Government's reforms. However, BCP Council's previous Best Value Notice, issued between August 2023 and September 2024 following concerns relating to governance, culture, financial planning and leadership, provides important context. That history is well known across key Government departments and means that there will inevitably be close scrutiny of the Council's progress in delivering the Reform Plan.

Effective implementation, transparency and robust scrutiny will be particularly important. It is in that context that I make the points below, not as criticism, but to help provide reassurance to Government, elected members, families and the wider community that the Plan is being delivered effectively and that progress can be clearly demonstrated.

BCP Councillor Eleanor Connolly, Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, has highlighted the importance of effective management of the SEND Reform Plan at the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14 September and subsequently written to officers to propose solutions, which I strongly endorse.

Given its scale, complexity and multi-year timeframe, elected members need to be able to track progress effectively, challenge delivery and understand whether the Plan is achieving its intended outcomes for children and families. While the document is a useful working document for officers, it is not always clear:

- How individual actions will be monitored
- Who is accountable for delivering each action
- What the relevant milestones are
- What constitutes business-as-usual activity and what specifically arises from the Reform Plan
- How individual actions ultimately contribute to measurable improvements for children and families

The existence of nine workstreams, each with its own operational plan and KPIs currently being developed, creates a further need for these elements to connect clearly. There needs to be a single, coherent line of sight from the overall Reform Plan through to specific actions, milestones, responsibilities, performance measures and outcomes.

I agree with Cllr Connolly that BCP Council should consider creating an additional standalone, enduring delivery document bringing these elements together. This should clearly set out:

1. What will be delivered
2. Who is responsible for delivery
3. When each action and milestone will be completed
4. How progress will be measured
5. What the relevant KPIs are
6. What outcomes are expected for children and families
7. How elected members and other stakeholders will be able to scrutinise progress over the lifetime of the Plan

Such a document would make the Reform Plan easier to understand and scrutinise, both now and into the future. It would also provide a stronger basis for demonstrating whether the Plan is delivering the intended improvements and supporting the case for future investment.

Given the scale and importance of the programme, Cllr Connolly has asked BCP Council to consider whether specialist project management expertise should be brought in to support delivery. I believe this is worthy of consideration, given the scale of the Plan, the need for effective oversight over many years and the importance of providing reassurance to children, young people and families.

Conclusion

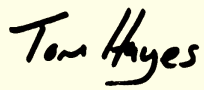
There is now a significant opportunity to improve SEND provision across Bournemouth East and the wider BCP area, while placing the Council on a stronger financial footing.

The priority must be ensuring that the benefits of reform are experienced by children, young people and families in practice. That means maintaining meaningful co-production, strengthening local provision, supporting the workforce, ensuring effective transitions and putting in place robust and transparent mechanisms for monitoring delivery.

For the children and families of Bournemouth East and the wider area, it is essential that the SEND Reform Plan is not merely signed off but effectively delivered.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with the Interim Corporate Director of Children's Services and the Director of Education and Skills.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Hayes MP
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