

Adam Jogee MP  
Sarah Edwards MP  
Jacob Collier MP  
Leigh Ingham MP  
Dr Allison Gardner MP  
Josh Newbury MP  
Dave Robertson MP  
David Williams MP

My Ref: AW / TK 113

Your Ref:

Date: 17 October 2024

Dear Colleague

Thank you for your letter dated 14 October setting out your concerns about Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) provision in Staffordshire. It is a matter of huge importance and one I am grateful to have your support in tackling.

We want every child in Staffordshire to have the opportunity to thrive and we are doing everything we can with the resources we have.

However, the reality is that Government funding is not nearly enough to meet the increasing need for support or the increasingly complex needs of the children we see.

Parents and guardians rightly have high expectations of the support available to their children, but this is now at odds with the national policy and funding position, leaving local authorities in an almost impossible position.

In Staffordshire, demand for support is increasing rapidly. In January 2019 there were 4,835 pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which had increased to 7,490 by January 2024. This represents a 55% increase in the number of children with an EHCP over the past four years.

We are working hard to give children the support they need at the earliest possible point, training 400 teachers to provide more support in mainstream schools. We also have 23 special schools educating around 2,700 children and young people and are investing in additional educational psychologists and SEND keyworkers to speed up and support with the increasing demands for assessments.

However, Staffordshire is underfunded by Government with regards to money for children with special educational needs and disabilities – ranking 128<sup>th</sup> out of 151

local authorities and as a result, our Dedicated Schools Grant deficit has now hit £31million. By 2028-9 it is expected to rise to between £150-300million. This is unsustainable and without national policy changes and proper funding, our efforts are unlikely to be enough.

This is not a matter which is unique to Staffordshire, the national system is failing and needs fundamental reform.

Research by the ISOS Partnership on behalf of the County Councils Network and the Local Government Association confirms that national funding has not kept pace with the growth in expenditure.

Their analysis suggests that spending by Local Authorities exceeded the high needs funding allocations from Government by £890million in 2023-4, and this could rise to £1.1billion and £1.3billion over the next two years.

There is a statutory override in place which allows local authorities to prioritise SEND spending without accounting for the deficit in their available balances.

However, it is currently a temporary measure, and the scale of debt is so great that 50% of councils responding said they would be insolvent within a year (25%) or three years (25%) if the current statutory override is removed.

So, I absolutely agree that decisive action is required, and I would welcome your support in making representations to Government to support the immediate and whole system reform required.

The Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, Cllr Jonathan Price and I would be happy to meet you to discuss the issue further. We will liaise with your offices to find a suitable date.

Yours sincerely



**Alan White**  
**Leader of the County Council**