Leicester
City Council

E3 and SENIF top up funding multi-agency panel

Terms of reference

Reviewed September 2026

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1. Purpose:

The purpose of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) panels is to ensure that there is a transparent, consistent, fair, and focused approach to decision making that is in line with the relevant legislation in awarding non statutory top-up funding (Element 3) to Children and Young People of statutory school age and SEND Inclusion Funding (SENIF) to Children aged 2-5.

The remit of the multi-agency funding panel is to consider requests from schools and settings as to whether a child may require additional resource to support their needs, which is considered above their universal inclusive mainstream offer.

These Terms of Reference provide the framework within which decisions are made, ensuring they are transparent, equitable, robust and consistent. They are designed to be realistic, practical and provide the right balance between helping the system to work for the diversity of children, young people, and their families/carers living in Leicester.

2. School Funding for SEND

Schools Formula Funding

For most children and young people with SEND, support is expected to be provided through the resources delegated to schools as part of their annual budget allocation. Mainstream schools are required to use their best endeavours to secure the special educational provision called for by a pupil's needs, as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014.

Funding for SEND in mainstream schools is delivered through a national three-element model.

Element 1: Core Educational Funding

Element 1 funding is provided through the school's delegated budget, including Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) funding. This funding is allocated according to pupil numbers and age ranges and supports the delivery of high-quality teaching and learning for all pupils.

This funding contributes towards staffing, curriculum delivery, leadership responsibilities and the overall operation of the school, including SENDCo responsibilities.

Element 2: Additional Needs Funding

Element 2 funding is allocated through the local school funding formula and reflects the characteristics and needs of the pupil population within a school.

Factors used in determining this allocation may include:

- Deprivation
- Prior attainment
- English as an Additional Language (EAL)
- Looked After Children
- Mobility

A proportion of this funding contributes towards a school's Notional SEND Budget.

The Notional SEND Budget

All mainstream schools receive a Notional SEND Budget as part of their delegated funding. This is not a separate allocation and is not linked to individual pupils. Rather, it represents the amount

of funding schools are expected to use to meet the needs of pupils with SEND from their overall budget.

The Notional SEND Budget should be used to support children and young people with SEND through:

- Quality First Teaching and adaptive teaching approaches
- Small group interventions
- Individualised support programmes
- Reasonable adjustments
- Specialist resources and equipment
- Staff training and development
- SENDCo leadership and coordination activities

Schools retain responsibility for determining how their overall delegated budget is used to meet the needs of their pupils and may invest more in SEND provision than the notional allocation indicates.

School Responsibilities

Schools receive their delegated budgets annually and are expected to plan strategically to meet the changing needs of cohorts over time. Funding is allocated based on census information and schools are expected to manage fluctuations in pupil numbers and levels of need through effective financial planning and the use of available resources.

The school's graduated approach, together with evidence of Best Endeavours and Reasonable Adjustments (BERA), should demonstrate how delegated funding has been utilised to support a child's needs before additional funding is requested.

Element 3:Top-Up Funding

Under the national high needs funding framework, mainstream schools are expected to meet the costs of additional support for pupils with SEND from their delegated resources, including their Notional SEND Budget.

Where the provision required for an individual child or young person exceeds the nationally prescribed threshold, schools may request additional High Needs Top-Up Funding from the Local Authority. In Leicester City, this is the equivalent of 15 hours of additional support (approximately) that is above ordinary classroom provision, in line with banding descriptors.

Top-Up Funding is intended to provide funding above Elements 1 and 2 where evidence demonstrates that a pupil requires provision that is additional to and different from that ordinarily available within a mainstream setting. Element 3 is typically awarded for two years (pilot) at panel with a midpoint review.

Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF)

In addition to schools' core funding and Notional SEND Budget, schools receive support through the Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF), which forms part of the Local Authority's Inclusion Strategy and broader work to strengthen inclusive mainstream practice.

Schools are expected to use Inclusive Mainstream Fund resources to develop sustainable whole-school approaches to inclusion, strengthen workforce capacity and improve the implementation of the graduated approach and ordinarily available provision. The fund does not replace a

school's responsibilities under Elements 1 and 2 funding arrangements and should be viewed as complementary to, rather than a substitute for, existing SEND funding.

3. Early Years Funding for SEND

Children with SEND in early years settings should, wherever possible, have their needs met through high-quality inclusive practice, reasonable adjustments, and the graduated approach. A range of funding streams are available to support early identification, intervention and inclusion within early years provision.

Universal Early Years Funding

All registered early years providers receive funding through the Early Years Funding Formula (EYFF) to deliver funded childcare entitlements. Providers are expected to use this funding to deliver high-quality provision for all children, including those with emerging or identified SEND. This includes implementing reasonable adjustments, adapting the learning environment, and providing appropriate support through ordinarily available provision.

Disability Access Fund (DAF)

The Disability Access Fund (DAF) is available for children accessing funded early education who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA). The purpose of DAF is to support providers in making reasonable adjustments and improving accessibility to enable children with disabilities to access early years provision. DAF is paid directly to the nominated early years provider and is intended to benefit the child throughout their placement. Early years children in primary school reception classes are not eligible.

Examples of how DAF may be used include:

- Improvements to the physical environment
- Additional resources and equipment
- Communication supports
- Staff training
- Adaptations that promote inclusion and participation

Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF)

Under the Early Years Funding Regulations, local authorities are required to establish a SEN Inclusion Fund (SENIF) for all children with SEND who are taking up their funded early education entitlement (FEEE). SENIF is child-specific and is intended to be for support that is additional to or different from their ordinarily available inclusive provision. SENIF is typically awarded for one year.

Inclusive Early Years Fund (IEYF)

The Department for Education has introduced the Inclusive Early Years Fund (IEYF) to strengthen inclusive practice across early years settings and support the development of sustainable, inclusive provision. The fund complements existing SEND funding streams, including SENIF, DAF and High Needs Funding. It is intended to support providers to become more inclusive and reduce reliance on individual funding applications and statutory processes. Unlike SENIF, the Inclusive Early Years Fund is not linked to individual children. Instead, it is intended to support whole-setting approaches to inclusion and early intervention. The fund

should be viewed as complementary to, and not a replacement for, SENIF, DAF, high needs funding or providers' core funding arrangements.

4. Legal Framework, Policy and Guidance

The following national legislation and statutory information applies to SEND panels:

- The Children and Families Act 2014
- Education Act 1996
- Equality Act 2010: Advice for schools
- SEND Code of Practice
- The Children's Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Vol2/3
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 - Case Law

Local framework and guidance:

- Leicester City guide to mainstream inclusive practice and provision in schools and settings. BERA framework: https://schools.leicester.gov.uk/services/special-education-needs-and-disability-support-service/quality-inclusion-team/bera-framework-best-endeavours-reasonable-adjustments/

5. Confidentiality, Safeguarding & Declaration of Interests or Dispute

Confidentiality

Panel members and observers must uphold confidentiality in all cases considered at the Panel in accordance with the Council's and their own organisation's Data Protection rules.

Safeguarding

Panel members will work together to ensure the protection and well-being of children in accordance with Working Together (2018) and The Children Act 1989 & 2004. Any concerns to be raised immediately to the Panel Chair and safeguarding procedures followed.

Declaration of Interests or Dispute

Panel members are required to declare any personal interests in a case in advance of the panel discussions. If a panel member has a personal interest in a case, they will be required to leave the meeting for that case and will play no role in the panel discussion or decision. If there is a dispute regarding a case, panel members are to escalate to the chair and/or team managers.

6. Membership

Representatives from the following professional groups will be invited to the panel:

- Quality Inclusion Team (QIT)
- Education Psychology Service
- Early Years Support Team
- Learning, Communication & Interaction Team
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health Team
- Vision & Hearing Support Team
- Virtual Schools
- School SENDCos

The panel is considered quorate when at least three core members from the representing services above are present.

Observers

Observers are invited to the panel for training and quality assurance purposes. They will need to book in advance through the Multi-Agency Panel (MAP) Coordinator.

Prior to participating in a panel as a decision-maker, participants are requested to attend a panel as an observer. You may attend as an observer as many times as you feel necessary to support you to participate in the process. Observers do not have a vote at panel; however, they are invited to contribute and ask questions.

7. Frequency

All panel meetings will be held virtually, using Teams. The Panel will meet weekly on a Thursday morning during term time.

Additional panels may need to be scheduled to accommodate holiday periods and peaks in application volumes.

8. Panel Member Roles and Responsibilities

Panel Member Responsibilities

Panel Members are expected to:

- Adhere to all Information Governance requirements and maintain the confidentiality of information shared at panel meetings.
- Declare any conflicts of interest to the Panel Chair prior to the meeting.
- Contribute specialist knowledge and provide impartial advice whilst ensuring that the best interests of the child or young person remain central to all discussions.
- Ensure the graduated approach has been followed.
- Use their experience and knowledge to offer views on assessments, outcomes, provision, and alternative pathways to make a decision in accordance with the SEND Code of Practice and Leicester City's Banding Descriptors
- Ensure that comments, recommendations, and decisions are based solely on the evidence presented within the documentation provided for consideration.
- Participate constructively in discussion, providing professional challenge where appropriate.
- Act in a manner that promotes trust, integrity and public confidence in the panel process.

Decision Making

Panel members will ensure that all decision making:

- Is evidence-based, open, transparent, equitable and consistent.
- Represents value for money; making effective use of available resources and a range of appropriate provision appropriate to the needs.
- Considers whether the information submitted is aspirational and centred around the child or young person.
- Promotes the empowerment and participation of children, young people and their families.
- Upholds equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Takes account of preparation for key transitions in education.

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- Supports preparation for adulthood with positive outcomes for life skills and independence.
- Encourages collaborative and multi-agency working to secure the best possible outcomes.
- Gives due regard to safeguarding considerations and the welfare of all children and young people within education settings.

Panel Member Accountability

Panel Members are accountable for ensuring that their contributions, recommendations, and decisions are made in accordance with these Terms of Reference, the SEND Code of Practice, relevant legislation, local authority policies, and agreed panel procedures. All panel members take collective responsibility for panel decisions once they have been reached, regardless of individual viewpoints expressed during discussions. Panel members will maintain confidentiality and use information shared through the panel solely for the purposes of fulfilling their role as a Panel Member. The Panel Chair will hold overall responsibility for ensuring the panel operates in accordance with these Terms of Reference.

9. Banding Descriptors

Banding descriptors provide a best fit model to describe both need and provision for children and young people in Leicester City.

They include universal provision (BERA) at school's resource, top up Bands 1, 2, 3 and A, B, C and specialist bands. They incorporate early years, primary mainstream, secondary mainstream, specialist bases (Designated Specialist Provision - DSP) and special schools.

These banding descriptors have been co-produced by schools and Local Authority (LA) professionals and are now being piloted across all Leicester City funding panels.

For this multiagency panel we use:

- Banding descriptors – Early Years
- Banding descriptors – Cognition and Learning
- Banding descriptors – Communication and Interaction
- Banding descriptors – Social, Emotional and Mental Health
- Banding descriptors – Sensory and Physical

Please use this link for banding descriptors in full**:**
https://schools.leicester.gov.uk/services/special-education-needs-and-disability-support-service/quality-inclusion-team/element-3-funding/

10. Panel Administration

- When panel members are confirmed, Teams Meeting links and invites will be sent from the MAP Coordinator in advance.
- Panel attendees will be sent the relevant paperwork the week before the panel meets.
- Decision making panel members will read applications and record their decisions on the attached panel agenda. This is to be returned to the Quality Inclusion Team prior to the panel.
- If a panel member is unable to attend the meeting, they may arrange for an appropriate representative to attend on their behalf and notify the Quality Inclusion Team and/or MAP Coordinator.

- All panel meetings will be recorded on TEAMS. The minutes of discussion will be recorded on the agenda spreadsheet by the MAP Coordinator and the Chair.
- Schools and settings will receive a decision in writing within a week, once records have been authorised by the Chair.
- If a SENDCo is attending a panel which contains applications from their school, they are not required to record a banding on the panel agenda for their applications. In the panel meeting, these applications will be held until the end of the agenda and the SENDCo will be asked to leave the meeting prior to discussion and decision making.
- Prior to becoming a decision maker at panel, it is expected that all panel members have observed at least one panel, viewed the panel training video, read the terms of reference and all associated documents.

11. Panel Outcomes and Communication

a) Funding Agreed: Panel agree that needs and provision meet criteria and make an award based on the banding descriptors. (Bands 1, 2, 3 for Schools or A, B, C for Early Years) Panel may also make recommendations and suggestions.

   Finance will notify the school/setting of the band awarded within a week. Quality Inclusion Team will contact the school if required.

b) Funding Agreed (AWAC): Panel agree that it meets criteria for funding and agree on a provisional banding, but they have query about a section of the application. It will be Awarded When Actions are Complete (AWAC).

   Quality Inclusion Team will contact the school/setting to confirm this information before funding is awarded. Notification from Finance will be sent once information has been received and checked.

c) Funding Not Agreed (Return): Panel cannot reach a consensus on a banding. There are multiple queries or missing information regarding need, provision and timetable.

   Finance will return the application and Quality Inclusion Team will offer support to the school or setting within a week. A new application can be returned to the next available panel.

d) Application Not Accepted (Reject): Panel agree that the application does not meet the criteria or threshold for top-up funding. (An application for statutory assessment is in process, the school pupil no longer resides in Leicester City or the pupil's needs, and provision can be met by using school resource/BERA)

   Finance will return the application and Quality Inclusion Team will support if required. A new application can be made after six months if circumstances have changed.

12. Reapplication of Funding

A new funding application can be applied for six months into the existing funding. Where an application has previously been allocated funding at panel, the applicant should consider what new, updated and/or additional information is being supplied to require a new application. Due to the changing needs of the children and young people we work with, Leicester City recognises the requirement to be flexible and adaptive in its approach, in exceptional circumstances we will review current funding allocations and may alter funding allocations on a case-by-case basis.

These applications will not be considered without evidence of exceptional circumstances and professional involvement.

13. Terms of Reference Review

The terms of reference will be reviewed annually to reflect on decisions made and any emerging themes to influence strategy/joint commissioning arrangements; what is working well, any issues and improvements.

The local authority reserves the right to amend funding pathways and criteria as required to align with evolving SEND reforms, updated DfE policy and practice guidance, and recommendations resulting from recent and future funding consultations.

Appendix A - Funding Information and Links

Support for SENDCos completing E3 and SENIF Applications:

A number of supportive training videos have been created to explain each stage of the E3 and SENIF Applications.

For E3, these can be accessed by logging in to the Leicester City Schools' Extranet using this link: https://schools.leicester.gov.uk/services/special-education-needs-and-disability-support-service/quality-inclusion-team/element-3-funding/element-3-funding-application-form/element-3-training/

For SENIF, these can be accessed using this link: https://schools.leicester.gov.uk/services/special-education-needs-and-disability-support-service/quality-inclusion-team/element-3-funding/element-3-funding-application-form/senif-training/

Please note that there is a new school portal for submitting E3 and SENIF applications, which means that the form will be displayed differently from what appears in the videos. However, the required content for making a funding application has remained the same. The new portal can be accessed using this link: https://schools.leicester.gov.uk/services/school-portal/

Alternative Provision (AP):

Top up funding to support external alternative provision should be applied for via the separate AP/E3 panel process. The application form, guidance and further information can be accessed using this link: https://schools.leicester.gov.uk/services/special-education-needs-and-disability-support-service/quality-inclusion-team/alternative-provision/

Short Term (Emergency) Top Up Funding:

Schools and settings may apply for short term (emergency) funding at times of high need and in exceptional circumstances. This is awarded for 17 weeks at an emergency panel. The criteria and application form can be found using this link: https://schools.leicester.gov.uk/services/special-education-needs-and-disability-support-service/quality-inclusion-team/element-3-funding/element-3-funding-application-form/request-for-emergency-element-3-funding/

Early Years Transition Funding

Transition funding (one term of funding) is available for children that are moving into F1 (preschool) or F2 (reception) who are known to the Early Years Support Team (EYST). Schools and settings are required to discuss this with their Early Years link teacher to check eligibility.

SENIF funding can be transferred between settings and schools to support transition.

Transfer Funding (Primary to Secondary & Infant to Junior)

Top up funding can be transferred between schools to support transition. Schools must complete the paperwork in partnership as part of their transition meetings and submit to panel in the Summer Term. Paperwork and guidance can be found using this link: https://schools.leicester.gov.uk/services/special-education-needs-and-disability-support-

service/quality-inclusion-team/element-3-funding/element-3-funding-application-form/transfer-of-e3-funding/

Group Funding for Schools (Pilot)

Schools that have Support Bases (IAPs) may be able to apply for group funding to support their SEND pupils. Criteria, process and guidance can be found in the group funding handbook: https://schools.leicester.gov.uk/media/10234/group-funding-handbook-26-27-academic-year_print.pdf

Appendix B - E3 & SENIF Top Up Funding Process

E3/SENIF Process

1

GRADUATED APPROACH

- SEND needs have been identified and assessed.
- Outcomes (targets), a plan and provision has been put in place and reviewed.
- Support required is deemed additional to ordinarily available inclusive mainstream provision (BERA).
- SENCO meets with parents/carers, the pupil and significant adults who work with them to gather and collate evidence for a funding request.
- School or setting apply for top up funding via the Leicester City school portal.

2

APPLICATION

- Applications may be checked (pre-sift process) prior to panel to ensure that they contain all required information.
- The application is allocated to a panel and an email is sent informing the school or setting.
- Please note, at this stage, the pupil's postcode and Statutory Assessment status will be checked. If they reside outside of Leicester City or a Statutory Assessment request is in process the application will be rejected and the school or setting will be notified.

3

PANEL

- All applications are considered at a multiagency panel.
- Panel agree that needs and provision meet criteria and make an award based on the banding descriptors. (Bands 1, 2, 3 for Schools or A, B, C for Early Years)
- Panel may require further information and choose to return an application.
- Applications may not be awarded funding if they do not meet the criteria and threshold for funding.
- Funding is allocated for two years for schools and for one year for Early Years settings.
- An email notification of the decision will be sent within 7 business days.

4

REVIEW

- Schools and settings follow the graduated approach.
- Six months after a panel decision, the school or setting can choose to reapply for top up funding.
- For schools with two year funding, a mid-point review will be requested.
- The Quality Inclusion Team may contact schools to carry out an Inclusive Provision Review or One-Year Review visit as part of the LA Quality Assurance process.