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# New East Surrey Council calls for current SEND plans

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Leading East Surrey councillors are calling on Surrey County Council to publish its plans to reform special educational needs and disability (SEND) support across the county.

The Liberal Democrat-led shadow authority wants the county council to make public its three-year SEND Reform Plan to allow for “wider transparency” over education.

East Surrey Council will assume responsibility for education across the county’s eastern boroughs from next April, when Surrey County Council is abolished along with the 11 district councils.

However, until then, the county council remains responsible for school and SEND support across Surrey.

Councils across England have been called on to produce SEND Reform Plans to the Department for Education (DfE) – a condition towards getting a 90 percent SEND deficit write-off.

While many councils have made these publicly available already, Surrey is among those keeping their draft plan under wraps until it receives government approval.

But at a meeting of East Surrey shadow authority’s cabinet this week, councillors called for this document to be made publicly available now.

The shadow authority’s children and youth services lead Councillor Ashley Tilling (Liberal Democrats: Walton South & Oatlands) said that while cabinet members have seen the plan, the lack of publication means “there’s no wider transparency of what that reform plan entails.”

He added: “We need to be engaging with schools, we need to be engaging with specialist support, we need to be showing parents that we are transparent in what we’re doing going forward as East Surrey.”

It came as cabinet members discussed Surrey County Council’s Experts at Hand grant – aimed at helping bolster the specialist workforce to further help SEND provision.

East Surrey council leader Councillor Steve Wotton (Liberal Democrats: Horley West, Salfords & Sidlow) agreed that his cabinet should request the plan’s publication by Surrey County Council.

“It would be in alignment with our commitment to be a transparent council from when we take this on,” he said.

These calls were echoed by Liberal Democrat MP for Dorking and Horley Chris Coghlan, who said: “It’s egregious that Surrey haven’t yet published their draft local SEND Reform Plan, despite around 40 other local authorities sharing theirs.

“This is vital for transparency for countless worried parents and helping tackle the SEND crisis in Surrey.”

Education news outlet Schools Week has reported that 40 draft SEND Reform Plans have been published across England so far.

However, there is no legal obligation on councils to do so at this stage, and many authorities have opted to wait for DfE approval before making them publicly available.

East Surrey opposition leader Councillor David Lewis (Conservative: Cobham & Oxshott South) told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “The East Surrey Conservative Group understands that as with many other local authorities, Surrey County Council is currently awaiting feedback from the Department for Education on its SEND reform plans.

“The Conservatives are reassured that the council remains committed to transparency and welcome its commitment to publish the plans as soon as the necessary approval is received from the DfE.

“The East Surrey Conservatives understand that Surrey County Council looks forward to sharing further details with residents and stakeholders at the earliest opportunity.”

A Surrey County Council spokesperson said: “Like many other local authorities, we are currently awaiting feedback from the Department for Education on our SEND reform plans.

“We remain committed to transparency and will publish our plans as soon as we receive the necessary approval from the DfE.

“We look forward to sharing further details with residents and stakeholders at the earliest opportunity.”

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Image: East Surrey shadow council meet Ashley Tilling and Epsom and Ewell LibDem Cllr Julian Freeman to his left. Credit Elmbridge Council

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