ALTERNATIVE PROVISION SCRUTINY MEETING

DATE	**26th November 2026**
REPORT OF	**Ann-Marie Matson – Director of Children's Services**
SUBJECT	**Alternative Provision**
STATUS	**Open**

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The recommendations within this report support the Council's Plan 2025-2028 ambition of delivering Stronger Economy and Stronger Communities. The proposed approach will improve inclusion, educational engagement and outcomes for children and young people, strengthen partnership working across schools and services, and ensure earlier intervention for those at risk of exclusion or requiring alternative provision. Collectively, these actions contribute to ensuring that children and young people have the best start in life, are supported to achieve their potential, and receive the right support at the right time.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the proposed Alternative Provision arrangements for North East Lincolnshire. The proposals seek to strengthen oversight, improve consistency in decision-making and ensure children and young people access timely and appropriate support. The report sets out the rationale for the proposed approach, the expected benefits for pupils and schools, and invites the Scrutiny Panel to consider and comment on the recommendations

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

This report is for the purpose of updating Scrutiny panel members of project progress following Cabinet approval to commence in June 2025, and to provide an update on the findings and direction of travel.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

Historically, Alternative Provision (AP) within North East Lincolnshire has largely operated as a destination placement, with limited oversight of individual placements by schools, and few successes in terms of reintegration outcomes. Existing arrangements are underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding which has now been superseded with recent national policy, including the SEND Reforms and North East Lincolnshire's SENDAP sufficiency strategy. For these reasons, Cabinet approved a full review and recommissioning of the Alternative Provision offer in June 2025.

Since mobilisation, extensive research, engagement and insights has been conducted by the transformation team, identifying best practice, local and regional trends, and where opportunities to effect change for children can be improved.

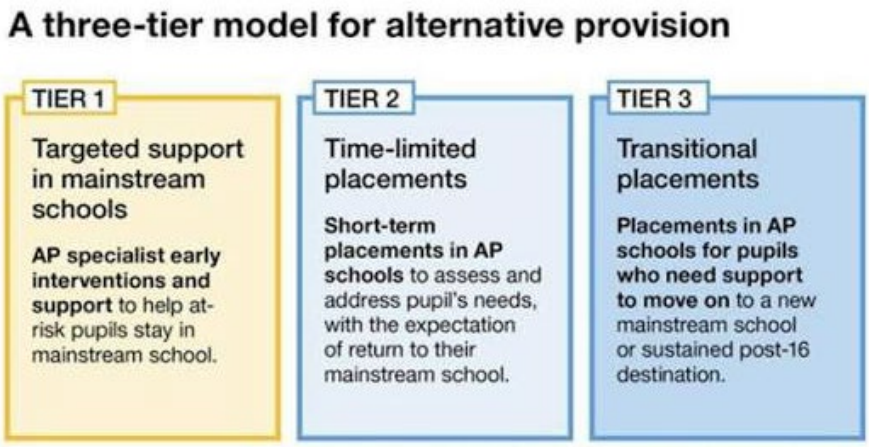
Analysis of local provision has identified a number of challenges, including low pupil attendance and limited accredited qualification outcomes There is also evidence that some pupils are being referred to Alternative Provision before early intervention approaches have been fully exhausted to support the child to remain in mainstream education, whilst simultaneously there is evidence that children are referred at crisis point with Alternative Provision considered at too late of a stage.

Nationally, outcomes for pupils educated in Alternative Provision remain significantly lower than those of their peers. As a result, there is an increasing emphasis on maintaining children and young people within mainstream education wherever possible, recognising the importance of belonging, inclusion, peer relationships and community connection.

At the same time, schools are reporting increasing challenges in meeting the needs of pupils with complex social, emotional and behavioural needs. Whilst permanent exclusions from mainstream settings are showing signs of decreasing, fixed-term suspensions have risen both locally and regionally. The current commissioned outreach support is limited in scope and is only focused on the primary sector, resulting in limited preventative support being available to schools before needs escalate, and mixed evidence of early identification put in place. However, this support is well received by mainstream settings, and can demonstrate positive impact on outcomes.

The current commissioned capacity of Alternative Provision in North East Lincolnshire is not utilised consistently, with a significant proportion of commissioned places remaining unfilled. This has presented the Authority with an opportunity to consider how resources can be used most effectively and efficiently to meet the needs of children in North East Lincolnshire, while supporting them to remain in inclusive mainstream education.

In response to the challenges identified by the wider transformation project based on insights from schools, AP providers, wider professionals, children and families; and the Department for Education’s blueprints for SEND Reforms, a new three-tier Alternative Provision model has been. The model is intended to provide a graduated continuum of support, with a greater emphasis on early intervention and targeted support in mainstream schools.



The existing commissioning arrangements address Tier 2 and Tier 3 appropriately, however these arrangements will be strengthened to improve oversight and quality assurance of both the Local Authority and schools to ensure that children are supported appropriately and mainstream schools are empowered to support children who return or who are moving onto a positive destination after permanent exclusion.

Within the future model, existing funds will be redeployed to establish a high-quality outreach support offer that will act as a preventative layer prior to a child needing a time-limited placement in an Alternative Provision school. This Tier 1 support is currently in evaluation and subject to options appraisal prior to a final decision on its nature.

The proposed model seeks to address these issues through strengthened governance and oversight of the referral system, which ensures that schools are following a clear graduated response to children on their roll who need additional support. This will include accountability for early support, as well as a new and enhanced outreach offer for children with SEMH needs, and improved partnership working between schools, AP providers and the local authority. This aims to ensure that Alternative Provision is used as part of a planned intervention, with improved outcomes for children and young people and greater support for mainstream schools.

The official start date of the future commissioned offer is intended as September 2027.

2. RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY ISSUES

The proposed arrangements present an opportunity to strengthen oversight of Alternative Provision placements, improve outcomes for children and young people, enhance support for mainstream schools and ensure Alternative Provision is used as part of a graduated and planned intervention.

There is also a risk that, without change, current challenges relating to pupil

outcomes, attendance, reintegration and the effective use of Alternative Provision capacity would continue.

There is a risk that schools may initially find the revised processes more challenging as expectations around evidence gathering, early intervention and placement review are strengthened. However, this will be mitigated through clear guidance, training and the development of an enhanced outreach offer to support schools in meeting pupils' needs at an earlier stage.

The proposals are intended to have a positive impact on children and young people, particularly those who are vulnerable, at risk of exclusion, or who have additional needs, by improving access to appropriate support and promoting greater inclusion within mainstream education wherever possible.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

There are potential positive reputational implications for the Council arising from the proposed arrangements. The recommendations support national policy direction by strengthening inclusion, improving oversight of Alternative Provision placements and promoting better outcomes for children and young people.

There is a potential reputational risk if the current arrangements remain unchanged, as identified challenges relating to oversight, outcomes and the effective use of provision may continue.

An implementation and communication plan will be agreed with key stakeholders, including schools, Alternative Provision providers and relevant Council services prior to formal launch in September 2027.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The costs associated with the delivery of this project are funded through the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

The entirety of future commissioning of places and services will utilise only the scope of the existing budget envelope, by redeploying funds appropriately based on data and insights to commission an offer that better meets the needs of children, fully aligned to the national SEND Reforms. This new approach to Alternative Provision will be delivered utilising the existing High Needs Block and does not necessitate additional funds..

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

The contents of this report relate to the transformation of Alternative Provision in North East Lincolnshire through the development of a graduated, outcomes-focused AP model. Strengthening the quality, consistency and oversight of AP placements is a key driver for improving outcomes for children and young people with additional needs, supporting greater inclusion, successful reintegration where

appropriate, and improved long-term educational, employment and health outcomes.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURE RECOVERY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct implications on climate change, nature recovery and the environment.

7. PUBLIC HEALTH, HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND MARMOT IMPLICATIONS

North East Lincolnshire Council has publicly committed to becoming a Marmot Place. Key tenets of this public health approach are to reduce health inequalities and improve outcomes across the population. The Alternative Provision (AP) Project has been developed with these principles in mind, recognising that many children and young people who are permanently excluded or accessing AP experience multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities, with national data indicating the long-term life impacts in terms of employment, health and criminal justice. Strengthening the quality, consistency and oversight of AP provision supports a more inclusive education system and contributes to improved long-term outcomes for these children and young people.

In practice, the proposed AP model seeks to address inequalities by ensuring children and young people receive timely, appropriate and outcomes-focused support.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

11. WARD IMPLICATIONS

The contents of this report are relating to children across the Borough and

therefore does not have implications for any specific ward areas.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Alternative Provision Cabinet Report – 11th June 2025

10.-Alternative-Provision-Transformation-Programme-Cabinet-Report.pdf

13. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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