



Date 02/03/2026

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh

By email: EHRCJ.committee@parliament.scot

Dear Convener,

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to the committee's inquiry into 'Neurodivergence in Scotland'. Given the complex nature of the issue, I felt it would be useful to provide further clarity and information around points made in discussion.

Education and school support provision in Scotland is underpinned by the long-standing commitment to the Getting It Right for Every Child approach, and the Additional Support for Learning Act. This intends to provide support for children and young people when they need it to help them reach their full potential. This legislation and approach do not require a diagnosis and in the majority of cases schools will have sought to meet the needs of a child in the education setting before, or regardless of a diagnosis being undertaken. We would emphasise that there is a range of excellent work undertaken in education by a skilled and committed workforce to achieve this, but recognise the provision of additional support, including neurodevelopmental support faces a number of challenges:

Need/Demand

In recent years there has been a systemwide rise in need and demand for neurodevelopmental support. Within education this has corresponded with significant rise in the need for additional support for learning as a whole. The proportion of learners within mainstream classes with an additional support need was reported at 43% in 2025 as opposed to 10.3% in 2010. This increase results in a significant related challenge to the delivery of support.

Furthermore, [the review of the implementation of the neurodevelopmental service specification](#) published in 2025, which I would again highlight as providing useful insight into current challenges and potential next steps with regards to providing

neurodevelopmental support for children and young people, found that new processes/ pathways for neurodevelopmental support and diagnosis 'front loaded' work into school settings resulting in significant challenges for education; with educational staff facing increased expectations and workload, including leading the neurodivergent assessment pathway. Participants in the review indicated that they did not have sufficient time, capacity, support or resources to service this, and the wider requirements of their role, fully. This risks potentially impacting the wellbeing of the workforce. It is also set in a context where, in some areas, health pathways for diagnosis are closed and cross sector working, accessing support required that sits beyond the scope of education provision, can be challenging.

Resources

It is important to highlight resource limitations, with resource availability not corresponding to rise in demand.

Additional support for learning (ASL) funding: ASL spend within councils has increased year on year. In 2024/25 councils spent £1.1bn on additional support for learning. Although an additional £28m funding introduced in 2025/26 for ASL was welcome, this accounts for just around 2.5% of ASL spend. Increasingly ringfenced or directed funding, including the focus on maintaining teacher numbers, limits the flexibility that local authorities have to direct funding elsewhere, such as pupil support assistants.

Neurodevelopmental Service Specification: following the publication of the Neurodevelopment Service Specification a small number of tests of change were identified, to whom short-term funding was provided. The tests of change have now drawn to a close and no wider funding to date has been provided to local government to support the expectations that have resulted following the specifications publication. This is challenging and will be particularly so in the context of a poor settlement for 26/27, there can be no expectation that Local Authorities can absorb any costs to support the further implementation of the neurodevelopmental service specification.

Capital Funding: learning environments have a key role in supporting children and young people with neurodevelopmental needs, including the physical environment. Positive adjustments that might be made in terms of tailored spaces may be restricted by the learning estate itself (e.g. – older buildings). Capital funding is already under pressure and a flat cash capital settlement for 26/27 means an increasingly unsustainable position where there is already a substantial reliance on council borrowing to fund capital/infrastructure projects.

Policy pressures: as noted wider evolving policy has the potential to impact resource available to provide additional support for those who need it in school settings. For example, COSLA welcomed the overall rise in teacher numbers in 2025 as shown in the December school education statistics from Scottish Government. The rise in teacher numbers and improved attendance rates demonstrate the hard work of our Local Authorities, Teachers, Children and Young People. We are however clear that improving outcomes requires other professionals including support staff, and educational psychologists. Ensuring local authorities have the flexibility to tailor staffing decisions to local need is vital to delivering the best outcomes for our children and young people.

Wider funding pressures: the neurodevelopmental service specification noted the importance of services such as family support. We also recognise the importance of wider locally based opportunities such as sports and learning opportunities that reduce isolation and foster communities of support. Many such opportunities are provided through local authorities but are put at risk by the wider fiscal challenge faced. This backdrop is provided in COSLA's budget reality document attached. Although an additional £20m has since been provided by the Scottish Government to support Real Living Wage in adult and children's social care and early learning and childcare, there is still only an additional £253.9m in uncommitted revenue funding in 2026/27 - this does not mitigate the scale of challenges faced by councils, including pay, inflation, increased demand and significant social care pressures.

In considering current and future pathways for neurodevelopmental support we must continue to be mindful of the impact of increased awareness of neurodevelopmental conditions and the associated increase in demand for support and diagnosis across the whole system. This includes education. Any asks of Local Government, including schools, must be both appropriate and fully resourced so that the needs of our children and young people continue to be met.

Policy Coherence

Education policy: work to ensure children and young people are appropriately supported sits alongside education reform, additional support needs, including neurodevelopmental support should be considered as this progresses. This is also true of wider policy development, for example on reduced class contact time where COSLA continue to work with Scottish Government and the Trade Unions to make meaningful progress. The impact of RCCT is likely to be greater on those with an additional support need, and we need to carefully consider this as part of any additional work. Equally, areas of national interest, including attendance and behaviour may be of particular relevance to children and young people requiring neurodevelopmental support and should continue to be approached mindful of this connection.

Neurodevelopmental support specifically is currently subject to welcome substantial interest at both a political and policy level. COSLA and Scottish Government undertook the review of the implementation of the service specification in 2025 which resulted in actions currently being taken forward by the current neurodevelopmental Taskforce, including the need for shared learning and a high-level descriptor of the system. Since then it has been the focus of a political Summit and two parliamentary inquiries. ND also sits within the wider additional support for learning umbrella where policy development is also being considered. It is important that next steps are well aligned across ND are the wider ASL landscape to ensure they are deliverable.

Yours Sincerely

Hannah Axon
Policy Manager
COSLA

#BUDGETREALITY

Issued on 13 January 2026

REVENUE FUNDING for 2026/27

Revenue funding announced for 26/27:	£15,002.3m
Revenue funding provided for 25/26:	£14,410.5m*
Cash increase:	£591.8m
Uncommitted cash increase:	£234.9m
<i>*finance circular 1/25</i>	

Scottish Government Commitments 25/26	£m
LG Pay Deal year one contribution	79.7
Teachers Pay year one contribution across 25/26 and 26/27	47
Total	£126.7m
Already committed for 26/27	£m
Real Living Wage 26/27 for Adult Social Care, ELC and Children's Social Care	201
Additional Discretionary Housing Benefit	9.3
Homelessness Prevention Funding	-7
Free Personal Nursing Care	7
Free School Meals – Pension Credit/AET Expansion	3
School Clothing Grant Inflationary Uplift and Educational Psychologists	0.5
Interisland Connectivity	11.4
Assessors – Mansion Tax	5
Total	£232.6m
TOTAL COMMITTED ADDITIONAL FUNDING	£356.9m
TOTAL UNCOMMITTED ADDITIONAL FUNDING	£234.9m

THE BUDGET REALITY IS THAT THERE IS £234.9m of ADDITIONAL UNCOMMITTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT CORE REVENUE FUNDING

KNOWN REVENUE PRESSURES FOR 26/27 INCLUDE 3.5% PAY UPLIFT, INFLATION AND DEMAND PRESSURES
OUR ASK: £16bn REVENUE including £750m for social care

CAPITAL FUNDING for 2026/27

Capital funding announced for 26/27:	£681.4m
Capital funding provided for 25/26*:	£779.6m
Cash reduction:	£98.2m
Uncommitted cash increase:	£0m
<i>*finance circular 1/25</i>	

Already committed for 26/27	£m
Distributed to SPT	12.4
Assessors Portal	2.7
Active Travel	16.1
Total	£31.2m
Reduced funding for 26/27	
Second year of Climate Emergency funding at reduced level	-20
End of Coastal Change funding	-5
Reprofiling Flooding Funding	-60
End of Play Park funding	-25
End of Nature Restoration Funding	-2.5
Total	-£117m
TOTAL COMMITTED ADDITIONAL FUNDING	£31.2m
TOTAL UNCOMMITTED ADDITIONAL FUNDING	£0m

THE BUDGET REALITY IS THAT THIS A CASH REDUCTION IN CORE CAPITAL FUNDING WHICH CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO KNOWN CEASATION OR REDUCTIONS OF PREVIOUS FUNDING STREAMS.

KNOWN PRESSURES FOR 26/27 INCLUDE INFLATION AND DEMAND

OUR ASK: £844m CAPITAL