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# Delivering Better Value Programme (DBV)

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**Report being considered by:** Schools' Forum on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2023

**Report Author:** Hester Collicutt

**Item for:** Discussion **By:** All Forum Members

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## 1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To inform the School Forum about the Delivering Better Value Programme and its initial findings.

## 2. Recommendation

1.1 That the report is noted.

## 3. Introduction/Background

3.1 Delivering Better Value (DBV) is a transformation programme managed by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) working to identify and implement local and national opportunities to improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND and place the system on a more sustainable financial footing.

3.2 The statutory override means that any DSG deficits are not included in the council's revenue budget. This override is due to end in 2025/26. Failure to mitigate the overspend in the High Needs Block will place the financial sustainability of the council at risk. It is crucial that engagement in DBV leads to sustainable changes which reduce the High Needs Block overspend.

3.3 The DfE has commissioned Newton Europe Consultancy to support LAs in the initial phase of the programme up to submission of grant application. The DBV programme is designing its support through 2 key approaches.

- **Short Term Help:** To identify sustainable changes in each LA that can drive high quality outcomes for children and young people with SEND, explore options to deliver financial sustainability, and to support building an evidence-based grant application to assist the implementation of those changes.
- **Informing Long Term Reform:** Build an objective evidence base across a third of the sector, which can be used to inform future policy and reform, build a national playbook & share best practice. In future, the evidence collated and mitigating actions will inform future national programmes of similar scale and intent.

3.4 55 Local Authorities have participated in this programme, in three tranches. West Berkshire is in Tranche 3. The **diagnostic** process of Tranche 3 occurs between July 2023 and December 2023.

- 1) **Module 1:** Uses data to assess historic growth in High Needs Block (HNB) spend and Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) numbers, breaking down current HNB spend by provision, understanding the trend in EHCP caseload, average cost and total cost by provision.

This enables the production of a forecast of projected growth in EHCPs and projected unit costs to clarify projected pressures on the HNB in future years. By reviewing these patterns of occurrence, it helps clarify what factors are driving HNB spend including primary need, age group and age at provision start. Key priority areas are identified to investigate further in Module 2. *(Completed October 2023)*

- 2) **Module 2:** Here the aim is to confirm the root causes of key priority areas by examining qualitative and quantitative evidence that covers individual journeys and system wide perspectives in West Berkshire. This evidence base quantifies the impact of key opportunities and puts the spotlight on the process, behavioural and digital changes that it will take to effect a positive change, improving outcomes and reducing the pressure on the HNB and promoting sustainability. *(Completed November 2023)*
- 3) **Module 3:** The output of Module 3 is an **Implementation Plan**, addressing key priority areas, for delivery of identified high impact realistic opportunities, devised with stake holders. This will form the **£1 million grant application** for the DBV Programme. This is required to be signed off by the Section 151 Officer and Executive Director of Children and Family Services before submission. Determining the maximum potential opportunity is a decision for each Local Authority to make. The Local Authority is required to return a proposal for an ambitious level of mitigation that can be delivered in their local SEND systems. The Implementation plan has to meet agreed criteria and the grant has to have been used by **31 March 2025**. *(Grant submission date by 14 December 2023)*.

### 3.5 Stage 2: Deficit Management Planning

This stage runs from **November 2023 – March 2024** and has two purposes.

- 1) To identify additional mitigations to complement the existing mitigations (assured) and the initial DBV diagnostic mitigations (assessed) identified by the authority in stage 1.
- 2) Stage 2 will review nine lines of enquiry which draw on mitigations being considered by other LAs and discuss their applicability to each authority in DBV.

The nine lines of enquiry: -

1. Financial Oversight and Governance
2. Early Support in education settings and Inclusion
3. Effective Management of Transitions and Step Down
4. Sufficiency Planning and Strategy
5. Commissioning Practice
6. Top Up Payments and Banding Arrangements
7. Alternative Provision and Education Other Than At School

8. Block Transfers
9. Contributions for Health and Social Care Provision

The Local Authority submits its deficit plan by **12 January 2024**

**The DBV Programme Board reviews submissions by 14 March 2024** and awards grants accordingly before **31 March 2024**.

#### 4. Options for Consideration

4.1 The DBV Implementation Plan will integrate, and support aspects of **West Berkshire's 2023 -2028 SEND Strategy**. The six identified strategic priorities in the draft SEND Strategy are:

- 1) The Early Years
- 2) The Universal Offer including mainstream school SEND provision
- 3) Increasing Local Specialist Provision
- 4) Pathways to Adulthood
- 5) Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and Young People's Mental Health
- 6) Short Breaks and Respite

This strategy programme and the DBV programme will be delivered by strategy implementation groups with representation from health, social care, educational settings, the voluntary sector and families themselves. Cross-agency accountability and leadership will be provided to the whole strategy and the DBV programme by the SEND Strategic Partnership Board which reports to the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Head of Education is the Senior Responsible Owner with the Service Manager for the SEN & Disabled Children's Service supporting the implementation of the programme.

The delivery of the DBV programme will be reported to and monitored externally by the DfE.

#### 5. Proposals

5.1 The outcomes from Module 1 Indicate that Maintained Special Schools (MSS) have historically been the largest area of spend in West Berkshire, followed by Independent Non Maintained (INMSS) and Alternative Provision (AP). MSS is forecasted to remain as one of the two biggest areas of spend in forecasting scenarios, driven mainly by unit cost growth due to capacity constraints in place. Expenditure in INMSS is expected to surpass MSS by 2028, driven by unit cost growth and caseload increase. These areas need to be addressed in order to reduce pressure on the HNB and impact on the overall deficit.

5.2 West Berkshire ranks in the top 20% amongst the DBV local authorities for its MSS unit cost and has the largest unit cost compared to its statistical neighbours. More work will need to be done on this. Module 2 activities will look to uncover the root causes that drive the growth in expenditure. The key focus areas are: Both unit cost and caseload growth in MSS and INMSS.

5.3 Stake holders from Schools, Health, Social Care, Local Authority and parent group representation attended a co-produced Implementation Planning Meeting on 16 November to identify priority areas within the SEND strategy to be supported through the DBV Programme. The meeting considered ways of improving outcomes and access to services at an earlier stage and ensuring mainstream provision is supported and equipped to meet the increased demand for SEND support whilst ensuring there is a sufficiency of specialist provision within the area. This will form the basis of the grant application proposal.

5.4 Given the high level of spend on specialist placements, of all types, more work will need to be done to consider approaches to inclusion and support available, utilising intervention, before specialist placements are requested. Lack of parental confidence is a key theme in the survey feedback, so it will be essential to take a system wide approach to build confidence. Approaches to the commissioning and procurement of SEN support and placements will be prioritised alongside a review of funding bands.

## 6. Conclusion

6.1 Identified proposals, initially funded through the DBV Grant must evidence sustainability beyond the end of the grant period (31 March 2025) and therefore any programmes will require wider transformational change across the system.

6.2 The expectation of the DfE, who will be monitoring the DBV programme, will be that a plan is produced to bring HNB spending in line by 2028 (which includes the recovery of the current deficit). This will be challenging but is essential to secure long-term financial sustainability of the council. The whole system must share ownership of this challenge and work together to address issues which are contributing to the current pressures.

## 7. Heads' Funding Group Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that the Heads Funding Group note the priorities contained within the SEND strategy whilst recognising the limitations and controls that will be in place through the DBV programme to manage and mitigate spend on SEND.

## 8. Appendices

Appendix A - DBV Programme Module 2 Findings