

High Needs Block Budget 2021/22			
Report being considered by:	Schools' Forum 7 th December 2020		
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Item for:	Discussion	By:	All Forum Members

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report sets out the current financial position of the high needs budget for 2020/21 and the position known so far for 2021/22, including the likely shortfall.

2. Recommendation

2.1 To note the predicted shortfall and request a further report on savings options.

Will the recommendation require the matter to be referred to the Council or the Executive for final determination?	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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3. Introduction

3.1 Setting a balanced budget for the High Needs Block continues to be a significant challenge; funding received for this block has only seen minimal increases for several years, yet the demand in terms of numbers of high needs pupils and unit costs of provision has continued to rise. Place funding has remained static in spite of increasing numbers, and in 2015/16 local authorities took on responsibility for students up to the age of 25 with SEND in FE colleges without the appropriate funding to cover the actual cost. The number of children with EHCPs is increasing, in spite of the threshold for an EHCP remaining the same and being applied robustly.

3.2 Up until 2016-17, West Berkshire was setting a balanced high needs budget. Since then, the budget has been under pressure on an annual basis, with savings identified each year to reduce the overspend. A decision was made to set a deficit budget for the first time in 2016/17.

3.3 Savings of £219k were implemented in 2017/18 and a further £306k in 2018/19. Despite these savings a budget was set in 2018/19 which included a planned overspend of £703k. The budget set for 2019/20 included a planned overspend of £1.6M. The budget set for 2020/21 included a planned overspend of £1.18m.

3.4 The pressure on the high needs block is a national issue, and many local authorities have significant over spends and have also set deficit budgets. South East regional benchmarking data shows that in West Berkshire overspending on the HNB as a % of the total HNB budget is one of the lowest in the region, but nevertheless it is an issue of ongoing concern.

3.5 Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 in Appendix A show where the predicted 2021-22 costs exceed 2020-21 budgets.

3.6 There will be an in year import / export adjustment to the HNB budget which is difficult to estimate at this stage. The current year import / export adjustment was £24,000

3.7 The net shortfall in the 2021-22 HNB budget, is **£3,946,115**. This includes a predicted 20/21 overspend of £1,296,067 and carried forward overspends of £1,279,122 in 19/20 and of £521,000 in 18/19. (Total carried forward overspend of £3,096,189). Without the carried forward overspends, the shortfall in 21-22 would be **£849,926**

3.8 The increase can be explained as follows:

- Overspend of £521,000 in 2018-19, carried forward
- Overspend of £1,279,122 in 2019-20, carried forward.
- Estimated overspend of £1,296,067 in 2020-21, carried forward
- Additional anticipated pressures in 21-22, over and above the deficit budget set in 2020-21, which relate to mainly to top up funding for children with EHCPs in a variety of settings. See Appendix A sections 2 and 3 below for more detail.

3.9 An extensive review of SEN provision and services took place during 2018, with full involvement of all stakeholders, including parents and schools. This resulted in a new 5 year SEND Strategy for West Berkshire which was approved by West Berkshire Council and the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group in November 2018. The Strategy seeks to address rising costs in the High Needs Block. It has 5 key priority areas:

- Improve the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the needs of children with SEND
- Expand local provision for children with SEND in order to reduce reliance on external placements
- Improve post 16 opportunities for young people with SEND, including better access to employment
- Improve preparation for adulthood, including transition from children's to adults' services in Social Care and Health
- Improve access to universal and targeted Health services for children with SEND

3.10 Work is now under way to implement the strategy, which should achieve savings in the High Needs Block over the next five years, but savings will take time to be realised.

3.11 Details of the services paid for from the high needs budget and the corresponding budget information are set out in Appendix A, together with an explanation of the reasons for budget increases.

4. Summary Financial Position

4.1 The latest estimate of expenditure in the High Needs Block budget for both 2020/21 and 2021/22 is set out in Table 1. This will continue to be refined over the next few months, particularly in relation to the largest variable element, which is top up funding.

The figures are based on all services continuing at current staffing levels and contract costs, with no change in the funding rates for top ups and the current/known number and funding level of pupils.

4.2 Most of the DSG allocation for the high needs block is now confirmed. Part of it is estimated and will be based on the actual number of pupils in special schools in the October 2020 census, and import/export adjustments based on the January 2020 census and February 2020 ILR.

TABLE 1	2020/21 Budget £	2020/21 Forecast £	2021/22 Estimate £
Place Funding	6,082,000	6,082,000	6,141,000
Top Up Funding	12,865,755	12,779,220	13,974,940
PRU Funding (top ups only)	1,375,920	1,389,850	1,389,860
Other Statutory Services	1,541,640	1,542,801	1,618,980
Non Statutory Services	1,063,270	1,007,170	1,111,530
Support Service Recharges	186,330	186,330	188,790
Total Expenditure	23,114,920	22,987,371	24,425,100

HNB DSG Allocation	-21,667,304	-21,691,304	-23,575,174
0.25% Schools Block Transfer	-263,285	-263,000	
In year overspend	1,184,331	1,296,067	849,926
HNB DSG Overspend from previous year	1,800,122	1,800,122	3,096,189
Total cumulative deficit	2,984,453	3,096,189	3,946,115

4.3 There is a forecast shortfall of **£849,926** in the 2021/22 HNB which may change as the budgets continue to be finalised.

4.4 Proposals for savings will be brought to the next meeting of the HFG / Schools' Forum. Any savings are likely to have to come from non statutory services, though the impact on statutory budgets will need to be taken in to consideration.

4.5 A consultation took place with schools in November 2020 on whether to transfer 0%, 0.25% or 0.5% from the Schools Block to the HNB. The results are to be discussed at the next Schools Forum, but are currently showing as in favour of a 0.25% transfer, which would amount to £287k.

4.6 Appendix A sets out the detail of the budgets included within the High Needs Block, and the reasons for the pressure on the 2020-21 HNB budget.

5. Appendices

Appendix A – High Needs Budget detail

Appendix A

High Needs Budget Detail

1. PLACE FUNDING – STATUTORY

- 1.1 Place funding is agreed by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and has to be passed on to the institution, forming their base budget. Academy and FE places are included in the initial HNB allocation but the agreed place numbers are then deducted and paid to the institution direct (DSG top slice). From 2018/19 pre 16 resource unit place funding was reduced from £10,000 to £6,000 per place, and each pupil within the unit is included in the main school formula funding allocation.
- 1.2 The ESFA will not fund any overall increases to places. If additional places are needed in academies or FE colleges, a request can be made to the ESFA. However, any additional places agreed would be top sliced from West Berkshire's HNB allocation in 2021-22; no additional funding is made available.
- 1.3 In total the allocated planned places in 2020-21 are 723 (see Table 1 below).
- 1.4 Requests have been made for an increase of 15 post 16 places in academies in 21-22, but this is offset by a reduction of 3 pre 16 places in academy resourced schools, so the net increase is 12. This net increase reflects an increase in placements in resourced provision in academies.
- 1.5 The increases and reductions in planned places for 21-22 are shown below by establishment.

Establishment	Current planned places	Proposed planned places	Change
Fir Tree ASD	7	8	+1
Trinity ASD/SpLD	49	54	-1 Pre 16 +6 Post 16 Net +5
Kennet PD/Hi	32	36	-2 Pre 16 +6 Post 16 Net +4
St. Bart's Post 16	3	5	+2
Total	93	105	+12

- 1.6 Planned places at establishments not listed above will remain the same for 2021-22.
- 1.7 It is not possible to increase planned places in maintained schools unless there are surplus planned places available for reallocation, which is not the case. There is a shortfall in planned places for children with EHCPs attending West Berkshire maintained special schools and PRUs, so this funding will need to be taken from the maintained special school and PRU EHCP top up budgets, creating additional pressure in those areas.

TABLE 1 - Place Funding Budget	2020/21 Budget			2021/22 Estimated Budget		
	No. of Places	£	Current No. of Pupils	Proposed No. of Places	£	Difference in number
Special Schools pre 16 (90540) –	286	2,860,000	409	286	2,860,000	0
Special Schools post 16 (90546) –	79	790,000		79	790,000	0
Resource Units Maintained pre 16 (90584) –	35	230,000	30	35	242,000	0
Resource Units Academies pre 16 (DSG top slice) –	103	684,000	101	101	634,000	-2
Mainstream Maintained post 16 –	5	25,000	6	5	38,000	0
Mainstream Academies post 16 (DSG top slice) –	16	96,000	19	30	180,000	+14
Further Education	133	737,000		133	737,000	-6
PRU Place Funding (90320)	66	660,000	72	66	660,000	0
TOTAL	723	6,082,000		735	6,141,000	+12

2. TOP UP FUNDING – STATUTORY

2.1 Top up funding is paid to the institutions where we are placing pupils who live in West Berkshire (we do not pay our institutions top up funding for pupils who live outside West Berkshire). **Table 2** shows the budget and forecast for 2020/21 and the estimate for 2021/22.

TABLE 2	2019/20 Budget		2020/21 Budget			2021/22	Difference 20/21 budget & 21/22 prediction
	Budget £	Outturn £	Budget £	Forecast £ (Month 7)	Over/ (under) £	Estimate £	
Special Schools Maintained (90539)	3,463,450	3,749,817	3,986,360	4,122,320	135,960	4,295,110	+308,750
Non WBC special schools (90548)	1,065,960	920,557	1,194,300	980,560	-213,740	1,278,090	+83,790
Resource Units Maintained (90617)	270,350	312,583	313,650	291,220	-22,430	314,000	+350
Resource Units Academies (90026)	946,530	826,870	948,280	979,460	31,180	1,047,730	+99,450
Resource Units Non WBC (90618)	143,580	164,744	130,600	158,380	27,780	170,540	+39,940
Mainstream Maintained (90621)	667,330	822,349	779,450	796,680	17,230	814,450	+35,000

High Needs Block Budget 2021/22

Mainstream Academies (90622)	267,460	360,616	389,600	398,340	8,740	400,000	+10,400
Mainstream Non WBC (90624)	73,030	79,555	70,590	138,450	67,860	160,510	+89,920
Non Maintained Special Schools (90575)	1,030,380	911,178	1,068,200	1,008,830	-59,370	1,028,040	-£40,160
Independent Special Schools (90579)	2,683,020	2,205,989	2,797,000	2,785,990	-11,010	3,338,740	+541,740
Further Education (90580)	1,408,870	1,141,252	1,087,730	1,087,730	0	1,087,730	0
Disproportionate HN Pupils (90627)	100,000	68,001	100,000	31,260	-68,740	40,000	-60,000
TOTAL	12,119,960	11,563,511	12,865,760	12,779,220	-86,540	13,974,940	+1,109,180

2.2 Most top up budgets are under pressure, with the type of placement creating the greatest pressure shown below in order of cost.

- Independent special schools
- Maintained special schools
- Resource units academies
- Mainstream non West Berkshire
- Non West Berkshire special schools
- Resource units non West Berkshire
- Mainstream maintained
- Mainstream academies

2.3 However, there are also savings on two of the top up cost centres:

- Non maintained special schools
- Disproportionate high needs budget

2.4 The predictions of cost for 2021-22 take in to account known pupils whose needs can no longer be met in local schools, together with some cases which are due to go to the SEND Tribunal. It is not possible to predict all pupils who may need placements in 2021-22. The figures assume a middle ground between the best case scenario and the worst case scenario (financially) in terms of Tribunal outcomes.

2.5 Independent special schools

This is by far the greatest pressure in the top up budgets. The pressure reflects a number of factors including the fact that some highly complex children have needed to be placed in very expensive placements in 20-21 and so have only incurred part year

costs this year, but will incur full year costs in 21-22. In addition there are a number of children with very complex SEMH (including ASD in some cases) who are very likely to need specialist places in 21-22. A number of these children would be suitable for the new planned SEMH/ASD provision but it is not possible for their current placements to be sustained until the new provision is available. Every effort is being made to avoid independent specialist school placements if it is possible to do so, but realistically the chances of doing so are low.

2.6 West Berkshire maintained special schools

This pressure reflects increasing numbers in our special schools, the need to compensate for inadequate planned place funding through the top up budget and some very high needs pupils needing additional support to maintain their placements. As there is no additional planned place funding for special schools, the extra planned place funding has been allowed for in this budget. Historically, special schools have only been paid £7,500 per extra place over and above the ESFA agreed planned places, which has placed an increasing strain on special schools as their numbers have increased. It is proposed that special schools from 2021-22 should be paid the full £10,000 for each additional place, which has been allowed for in the projected 2021-22 costs. *In addition, it should be noted that the special schools have put forward a case for further additional funding which will need to be considered. It is proposed that this should be the subject of a report to the next HFG / Schools Forum.*

2.7 Resource Units Academies

This pressure reflects a small number of young people with extremely complex physical disabilities attending our PD resourced provisions who would otherwise be in much more costly specialist placements. It also includes increased funding for several other children in our PD resources, as the needs of this cohort have become much more complex over time. In addition, the Fir Tree ASD Resource has been increasing its numbers up to the full capacity agreed when it was set up.

2.8 Mainstream top ups (non- West Berkshire schools)

This increase reflects a higher number of families opting for cross border secondary placements, including two high cost young people who might otherwise be in specialist provision.

2.9 Non West Berkshire special schools

This budget funds placements in special schools maintained by other Local Authorities and also special Free Schools. The increase is due to 4 students needing to move in to SEMH provision, including three currently in I-College and one currently in mainstream.

2.10 Resource units (non- West Berkshire)

This increase reflects one additional student requiring a place at The Rise ASD provision in Bracknell.

2.11 Mainstream top ups (maintained and academies)

This increase is due to a small increase in the number of EHCPs in mainstream schools, combined with an increase in the average cost of an EHCP.

2.12 FE Colleges

The figures above assume the same level of budget requirement for FE College placements in 21-22 as currently. More detailed work is being done on this and it is

possible that the budget requirement will be lower. An updated figure will be included in the next report to the HFG / Schools Forum on the HNB.

3. PUPIL REFERRAL UNITS (PRU) – STATUTORY

3.1 **Table 3** shows the budgets for PRU top ups.

TABLE 3	2019/20 Budget		2020/21 Budget			2021/22	Difference 20/21 budget & 21/22 prediction
	Budget £	Outturn £	Budget £	Forecast £ (Month 7)	Over/ (under) £	Estimate £	
PRU Top Up Funding (90625)	757,700	871,370	818,400	818,400	0	818,400	0
PRU EHCP SEMH Placements (90628)	331,400	505,724	557,520	571,450	13,930	571,460	+13,940
Non WBC PRU Top Up Funding (90626)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	1,089,100	1,377,094	1,375,920	1,389,850	13,930	1,389,860	+13,940

3.2 The current year budget was based on the previous year's forecast. Schools Forum agreed to pilot a 50% contribution from schools for pupils that they placed. Heads have requested that this contribution remains until a review in March 2022. Permanent exclusions and sixth form are funded 100% by the High Needs Block less the average pupil led funding contribution recovered from schools. The estimate for 21/22 PRU Top Up Funding is based on the profile of pupils at I-College in the summer term.

3.3 The number of pupils with EHCPs being placed in PRUs is increasing as this can be an appropriate and cost effective provision for some young people. A new provision for pupils with EHCPs was set up in autumn 2019, The Pod. These placements are usually more cost effective than independent and non-maintained special school placements.

4. OTHER STATUTORY SERVICES

4.1 **Table 4** details the budgets for other statutory services.

TABLE 4	2019/20 Budget		2020/21 Budget			2021/22	Difference 19/20 budget & 20/21 prediction
	Budget £	Outturn £	Budget £	Forecast £ (Month 7)	Over/ (under) £	Estimate £	
Applied Behaviour Analysis (90240)	119,120	136,178	136,580	160,970	24,390	148,190	+11,610

Sensory Impairment (90290)	236,000	228,079	227,590	245,633	18,043	247,860	+20,270
SEN Commissioned Provision (90577)	527,150	515,446	567,650	567,041	-609	584,480	+16,830
Equipment for SEN Pupils (90565)	15,000	8,429	15,000	22,480	7,480	15,000	0
Therapy Services (90295)	261,470	244,291	261,470	259,327	-2143	314,500	+53,030
Elective home Education Monitoring (90288)	28,240	21,603	28,240	28,240	0	28,240	0
Home Tuition Service (90315)	102,080	71,277	0	0	0	0	0
Medical Home Tuition (90282)	119,920	90,601	205,000	159,000	-46,000	172,730	-32,270
Hospital Tuition (90610)	36,000	16,345	39,050	39,050	0	39,280	+230
SEND Strategy (DSG) (90281)	56,200	33,015	61,060	61,060	0	68,700	+7,640
TOTAL	1,501,180	1,365,264	1,541,640	1,542,801	1161	1,618,980	77,340

4.2 Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)

4.2.1 This budget supports a small number of children with EHC Plans for whom the Authority has agreed an ABA programme. ABA is an intensive intervention programme for children with autism which aims to modify behaviours which are typical of ASD in order to allow children to function more successfully in school and in society.

4.2.2 This budget also covers the cost of children with EHC Plans accessing other bespoke educational packages where this is the most appropriate and cost effective way of meeting their needs, including SEN Personal Budgets.

4.2.3 The increase in costs represents an increase in Personal Budgets.

4.3 Sensory Impairment

4.3.1 Support for children with hearing, visual and multi-sensory impairments is purchased from the Berkshire Sensory Consortium Service. This includes support from qualified teachers of HI and VI, audiology and mobility support.

4.3.2 The budget requirement will be higher next year due to increased teachers' pay and pension costs.

4.4 Engaging Potential

4.4.1 Engaging Potential is an independent special school commissioned to provide alternative educational packages for 14 young people in Key Stage 4. Students placed at Engaging Potential are those who have EHC Plans for social, emotional and mental health difficulties and whose needs cannot be met in any other provision. This can include young people who have been excluded from specialist SEMH schools. The unit cost of a place represents good value for money compared to other independent schools for SEMH which typically start at around £70K per annum. The increase in cost for 2020-21 relates to the contract having been retendered in January 2020. The previous cost had remained fixed for several years under the

previous contract so an inflationary increase was necessary. There have also been increased premises costs.

4.5 Equipment for SEN Pupils

4.5.1 This budget used to fund large items of equipment such as specialist chairs and communication aids for pupils with EHC Plans. The budget has been reduced a number of times in previous HNB savings programmes and was removed entirely in 2018-19 on the basis that schools would meet these costs. However, this created a pressure for nurseries as they do not have delegated SEN budgets, and for resourced schools which have a disproportionate number of children with specialist equipment needs. It was agreed in 2018-19 that a budget of £10,000 would be made available to meet these needs. In 2019-20 it was agreed that the budget should be increased again to £15,000 as demand for equipment for children in nurseries and resourced schools was increasing. The budget will overspend this year, mainly due to one exceptionally high need student in one of our PD resources. It is recommended that the budget stays the same for 2022-22 as although this is a budget which does come under pressure, we have successfully negotiated with Health to fund 50% of specialist seating in schools in future which should reduce pressure on this budget.

4.6 Therapy Services (Contract with Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust)

4.6.1 The therapy services budget covers the costs for children with SEN who have speech and language therapy or occupational therapy in their EHC Plans.

4.6.2 Therapy services are provided by the Authority solely to children who have the need for a service stipulated and quantified in their EHC Plan. It is a statutory duty for the Local Authority to provide these therapies in these circumstances. The service is commissioned from the Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust.

4.6.3 We are currently in the process of extending the contract for one year with a view to a potential joint commissioning arrangement with other neighbouring Local Authorities at the end of the 12 month period.

4.6.4 The costs for 2021-22 are the provider's estimated costs for next year and have not yet been agreed, so this figure may reduce. The contract price has been fixed since 2018 so some uplift for increased staffing costs will be reasonable. The provider has also requested an additional part time post due to the increasing volume of Tribunal cases which require involvement of a speech and language or occupational therapist. This is still under discussion.

4.7 Elective Home Education (EHE) Monitoring

4.7.1 There is a statutory duty for Local Authorities to monitor arrangements for EHE made by parents. The EHE monitoring sits within the Education Welfare and Safeguarding Service. The Elective Home Education Officer is 0.6fte and was a new post for September 2019. EHE numbers have been growing, both locally and nationally over recent years but September and October 2020 have seen a steep rise in numbers due to COVID-19. In September 2019, eleven students were deregistered from schools; September 2020 saw 34 students deregistered.

4.8 Medical Tuition Service

4.8.1 The Medical Tuition Service (previously Home Tuition Service) is a statutory service providing home tuition to children with medical conditions and illness that prevent them accessing full-time school. This service was moved from i-College to the Local Authority with effect from September 2019 with savings and the following year's budget already agreed by Schools' Forum. £40K saving has been achieved as a result of transferring this service in house. Further savings have been proposed for 21/22

4.9 Hospital Tuition

4.9.1 The Local Authority is obliged to pay the educational element of specialist hospital placements, usually for severe mental health issues. These placements are decided by NHS colleagues and we have no influence over the placement or duration of stay. As numbers and costs are impossible to predict, it is proposed that the 2021-22 budget remains the same as 2020-21. There is a small increase due to inflation increases in salaries for the proportion of staff time administering this service

4.10 SEND Strategy Officer

4.10.1 In 2019-20 the Schools Forum agreed to fund a SEND Strategy Officer for three years initially to support implementation of the SEND Strategy 2018-23. Agreement was given by the Schools Forum in October 2020 that this post could be made permanent in order to attract and retain candidates of a suitable calibre.

5 NON STATUTORY Services

5.10 **Table 5** details the non-statutory service budgets for 2019-20, 2020-21, and estimates for 2021-22. These services are non-statutory so there is more potential scope to make savings, although a reduction in any of these budgets is likely to increase pressure on statutory budgets.

5.11 The table shows the budget for these services in 2021/22 assuming that the services continue and there are no changes to staffing levels.

5.12 Table 5 also includes ongoing funding for the "invest to save" initiatives agreed in 2020-21; an increase in the Vulnerable Children Grant and investment in the Therapeutic Thinking initiative in order to ensure it is sustainable.

TABLE 5 Non Statutory Services	2019/20 Budget		2020/21 Budget			2021/22	Difference 20/21 budget & 21/22 prediction
	Budget £	Outturn £	Budget £	Forecast £ (Month 7)	Over/ (under) £	Estimate £	
Language and Literacy Centres LALs (90555)	98,400	81,595	116,200	116,200	0	122,000	+5,800
Specialist Inclusion Support Service (90585)	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	0	50,000	0

TABLE 5	2019/20 Budget		2020/21 Budget			2021/22	
Non Statutory Services	Budget £	Outturn £	Budget £	Forecast £ (Month 7)	Over/ (under) £	Estimate £	Difference 20/21 budget & 21/22 prediction
PRU Outreach Service (90582)	61,200	61,200	61,200	61,200	0	61,200	0
Early Years Inclusion Fund (90238) moved to EY Block	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Special Needs Support Team (90280)	325,660	319,240	308,130	308,130	0	328,100	+19,970
ASD Advisory Service (90830)	146,210	153,307	208,390	157,240	-51,150	229,970	+21,580
Vulnerable Children (90961)	50,000	50,000	179,400	179,400	0	179,400	0
Early Development and Inclusion Team (90287)	40,000	40,000	51,950	53,000	1,050	56,560	+4,610
Dingley's Promise (90581)	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	0	30,000	0
Therapeutic Thinking (90372)	0	0	58,000	52,000	-6,000	54,300	-3,700
TOTAL	801,470	785,342	1,063,270	1,007,170	-56,100	1,111,530	+48,260

5.13 Language and Literacy Centres (LALs)

5.13.1 In September 2018, charges were introduced for placements at the Language and Literacy Centres at Theale and Winchcombe schools. Charges were based on 50% of the real cost of the place. These charges were introduced in order to alleviate pressure on the High Needs Block.

5.13.2 The LALs can provide 48 places per year for Year 5 students who have persistent difficulties with literacy and need an intensive programme delivered by a teacher qualified in specific literacy difficulties. Outcomes data for pupils who have attended the LALs shows that they make very significant progress prior to returning to Year 6 and then transitioning to secondary school.

5.13.3 Prior to the introduction of charging, all 48 LAL places were taken up every year. Since charging was introduced, the number of children accessing the LALs reduced to 33 in 2018 and 26 in 2019.

5.13.4 A survey of primary school head teachers clearly demonstrated that a large number of primary schools would have liked to refer pupils to LAL but could not afford to do so. 77% of schools who responded said that they had referred children to LAL in the three years prior to charging being introduced, but only 36% had made referrals since charging was introduced. A number of schools commented that they would like to refer to LAL but the charge was prohibitively expensive, especially for small schools.

5.13.5 There is some evidence that the reduction in children being able to access LAL is linked to an increase in requests for EHCPs and an increase in potential appeals to the SEND Tribunal for places in specialist schools for children with dyslexia, with associated costs.

5.13.6 It is also possible that secondary schools will begin to see an impact of the reduction in children accessing LAL in terms of literacy levels of Year 7 cohorts and the numbers of children needing intensive support for literacy.

5.13.7 It was therefore agreed in 2020-21 that the charges for LAL places would be removed so that all children who need this provision can access it and in order to avoid pressure for EHCPs and specialist placements for children with literacy difficulties.

5.13.8 The increase proposed to the LAL budgets relates to the budgets not currently meeting costs of the host schools. In previous years this has been covered off by carried forward amounts but these funds have now been exhausted.

5.14 Specialist Inclusion Support Service

5.14.1 This service provides outreach support from West Berkshire's special schools to mainstream schools to support the inclusion of children with learning and complex needs in their local mainstream schools.

5.14.2 This budget has been subject to reductions in the previous financial years with the special schools providing the service absorbing the cost.

5.15 PRU Outreach

5.15.1 The PRU Outreach Service offers consultancy / outreach support mainly to students who have been attending the iCollege and are starting to attend a mainstream school. Schools may request Outreach for any pupil causing concern but it is dependent on capacity.

5.16 Cognition and Learning Team

5.16.1 The Cognition and Learning Team (CALT) provides advice, support and training to mainstream schools to help them to meet the needs of children with SEN. Staff are experienced SENCOs with higher level SEN qualifications.

5.16.2 Many primary schools are reliant on this service to supplement their own SEN provision and expertise, especially schools where the Head has to act as SENCO or where there is an inexperienced SENCO.

5.16.3 This is a partially traded service. All schools receive a small amount of free core service, but the majority of support now has to be purchased by schools.

5.16.4 The additional cost represents teachers' salary increases, pension and NI.

5.17 ASD Advisory Service

5.17.1 The ASD Advisory Service provides advice, support and training for mainstream schools on meeting the needs of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The purpose of the service is to enable children with ASD to be successfully included in mainstream schools wherever possible.

5.17.2 The context for this service is vastly increasing numbers of children with ASD diagnoses and mainstream schools having more and more difficulty meeting the needs of these children. The majority of our placements in non-West Berkshire special schools, independent special schools and non-maintained special schools are for children with ASD.

5.17.3 In 2020-21 it was agreed that there would be investment in the service to provide two HLTAs. Recruitment to these posts was delayed due to Covid 19, but both posts have now been filled successfully and staff will start in January.

5.17.4 The increase in cost represents teachers' salary increases, pension and NI, plus a vacancy being filled by a teacher on UPS (previous postholder not on UPS).

5.18 Vulnerable Children

5.18.1 The Vulnerable Children Fund is a small budget used to help schools support their most vulnerable pupils on an emergency, unpredicted or short term basis.

5.18.2 The budget was gradually reduced from £120K over a number of years. This has always been a well used resource that helps schools support vulnerable pupils with complex needs. It was agreed in 2020-21 that this budget would be increased, as an invest to save initiative, in order to support the roll out of Therapeutic Thinking in West Berkshire schools. It is proposed that the increase agreed in 2020-21 is maintained in 2021-22. This would be the equivalent of using one year's funding for three permanently excluded pupils to attend the PRU. This additional sum would have the potential to support approximately 20 pupils and help prevent exclusions for each of them.

5.19 Early Development and Inclusion Team

5.19.1 The service comprises of 1.7 teachers who are specialists in early years and SEND. Children under 5 who are identified by Health professionals as having significant SEND are referred to this service. Staff initially visit children in their homes (if they are not yet in an early years setting) in order to promote their educational development and model strategies and resources for parents to use to support their child's progress.

5.19.2 EDIT teachers also assist with the transition to early years settings and schools, providing support and training for staff to help them to meet the child's needs, and continuing to visit for a period of time to provide ongoing support and advice. They also help to coordinate support which the family is receiving from other professionals.

5.19.3 The service is currently supporting approximately 100 children. It has been reduced in size in recent years from 3.4 to 1.7 staff.

5.20 Dingley's Promise

5.20.1 Dingley's Promise is a charitable organisation which provides pre-school provision for children under 5 with SEND in West Berkshire, Reading and Wokingham. It is the only specialist early years SEND setting in the private, voluntary and independent early years sector in West Berkshire. It provides an alternative to mainstream early year's settings, where experience and expertise in SEND can vary greatly. Parents are able to take up their early year's entitlement at Dingley's Promise, rather than at a mainstream early years setting, if they wish. However, Dingley's Promise are only able to claim the standard hourly rate for providing the early years entitlement as mainstream settings, in spite of offering specialist provision, higher ratios and more one to one support.

5.20.2 In 2017-18, the service was running at a loss and there was a risk it would cease to be viable in this area without some Council funding. It was agreed in 2018-19 that a grant of £30,000 would be made to Dingley's Promise in order to maintain the service in this area.

5.21 Therapeutic Thinking Officer

5.21.1 Over 120 school staff and West Berkshire employees have attended engagement days which helped them to understand how to support children and young people in schools in a trauma informed way. In addition, over 70 school staff and LA employees attended three day train the trainer training in order to upskill themselves to deliver training in therapeutic thinking in their own settings. Other local authorities that have adopted a similar approach have seen impressive outcomes. For example, one local authority found that in schools where head teachers were trained as trainers there was a 60% reduction in fixed term exclusions, an 89.5% reduction in exclusion days and no permanent exclusions. This was achieved within a year.

5.21.2 Both the engagement day training and the 3 day training have been evaluated positively. The evaluation is outlined below.

5.21.3 The Therapeutic Thinking Invest to Save Project have had a significant impact on staff skills and reported practice. In order to sustain change across West Berkshire It is recommend that HNB funds a 3year fixed term post of Therapeutic Thinking Officer to lead network meetings for school leads, develop policy and practice within West Berkshire and in schools and to continue to deliver the engagement and train the trainer courses.

5.21.4 The appointment of a dedicated lead has enabled the authority to start to embed this approach. Due to Covid restrictions it has been necessary to adapt the training to online modules. This has been well received by schools.

5.21.5 In order to ensure that therapeutic thinking can be moved forward in a timely way, it is proposed that the Therapeutic Thinking Officer post continues to be funded from the High Needs Block. In order to retain candidates of suitable calibre, and in order to maintain momentum on Therapeutic Thinking projects, it is suggested that the post be offered on permanent basis.

5.21.6 Without this post there is a serious risk that the potential of the Therapeutic Thinking to realise savings in the HNB will not be realised. It is difficult to be precise about the savings which could be achieved through creation of new provision.

However, the following should provide a broad illustration of potential savings from one of the projects in the strategy.

5.21.7 A reduction in permanent exclusions by 25% maintained for three years would equate to approximately 17 less permanent exclusions in that time period which would result in a saving of £340K. Some students from this group go on to be placed in schools which cost an average of £62,000 per place per year, therefore there is the potential to save £428K over 3 years if for example 2 of the 17 students spend one year in such provision.

Heads Funding Group Recommendations: