
Briefing Note – DSG High Needs Block and the DfE ‘Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme’

Produced for:	Schools’ Forum
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1 Purpose of the Briefing

- 1.1 To provide an update on the Dedicated Schools’ Grant, High Needs Block overspend and West Berkshire Council being invited to join the DfE’s ‘Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND Programme’

2 Background

- 2.1 As previously reported to Corporate Board and Budget Board in September 2021 and February 2021, West Berkshire, along with many other local authorities, has seen significant pressure on the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
- 2.2 These pressures have arisen as a consequence of authorities needing to meet their statutory duties for children with SEND, which are open ended in that all children who have a certain level of need that meets the education, health and care plan (EHCP) threshold have to have their needs met, regardless of budgetary constraints.
- 2.3 While we have robust systems in place, numbers have continued to rise, by 14.5% between 2017 and 2020 (nationally across the same period this was 33%). The increase in numbers is compounded by increased levels of complexity, requiring increased support and more (expensive) specialist placements.
- 2.4 An extensive review of West Berkshire SEND provision and services took place in 2018, with full involvement of stakeholders, including schools and parents. The result was a new co-produced 5 year SEND strategy and delivery plan, which was approved by West Berkshire Council and the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group in November 2018. The strategy seeks to improve provision and address rising costs through:
 - Increasing capacity in mainstream schools

- Expanding local specialist provision
- Improving post-16 opportunities
- Improving preparation for adulthood
- Improving access to Health Services

3 Current Status

- 3.1 The net shortfall in the 2021-22 HNB budget is £3.6m, with a predicted net position at the end of 2022-23 of circa £5.3m.
- 3.2 The government have recognised that this is a national problem on a significant scale and are seeking to address some of the fundamental pressure points through the proposals set out in the current SEND Green Paper consultation: [SEND review: right support, right place, right time](#)
- 3.3 In addition, they have set aside funds to work with local authorities to make SEND provision fit within the cost envelope. Two schemes have been introduced. One for local authorities with the biggest deficits called the 'Safety Valve Programme' and a second scheme they are just launching for LAs with substantial, but less severe deficits. This is called the 'Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND Programme'
- 3.4 The DfE wrote to West Berkshire on 17th February outlining the DBV Programme and inviting key officers to attend a briefing about it on 21st March 2022. This meeting was held virtually and chaired by Tony McArdle, Chair of the DfE SEND Leadership Board and former Chief Executive of Lincolnshire County Council.
- 3.5 The DBV Programme is open to invited authorities and aims to deliver local transformation over a three year period from the point of entry.

4 Implications and Impact

- 4.1 Entry to DBV is by invitation, voluntary and at no cost, though it does require commitment of time to work with the DfE delivery partner, SEND and Finance advisers.

5 Next Steps

- 5.1 We have been enrolled into the Programme and been assigned on entry point. There will be three entry tranches, starting in June with LAs who have the highest deficits (below the Safety Valve Programme threshold). Tranche 2 will enter in the autumn and Tranche 3 will join in spring 2023. West Berkshire sits in Tranche 3.
- 5.2 An outline of the DBV Programme has been set out by the DfE as below:
 - Pre-engagement strategy meeting: West Berkshire to meet with DfE to discuss the programme in detail, the nature of support the Department would be providing and how West Berkshire will best work with the Department to drive and achieve the objectives of the programme. This meeting may involve two or three other LAs.

- Phase 1- 6 months: The Department will provide project management and change management capacity, alongside SEND financial and practice advisers, to support West Berkshire in engaging with its key stakeholders and conducting a comprehensive diagnostic process to identify the underlying cost drivers of its high needs system and potential reforms to manage/mitigate these cost drivers more effectively
- Phase 2 – 30 months: The Department will work with West Berkshire to determine which identified reforms to fund, and will provide grants directly to West Berkshire to enable you implement and embed these reforms, with ongoing support and challenge by DfE officials.
- The Secretary of State and DfE Ministers will be updated quarterly on the progress of these reforms for the 55 local authorities involved

5.3 A further report will be provided in the Spring to update officers and members on progress, including identifying any pressures this review may create

6 Supporting Information (if required)

None

7 Conclusion

7.1 It would be beneficial to participate in this programme, which will provide external review, transformational expertise and potential additional investment to delivery change.

8 Appendices

None