

Appendix C

Education Review West Berkshire Council Report October 2022

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A Introduction

1. This review was commissioned by the West Berkshire Executive Director People to provide a view on the structure and delivery of the Education Service, taking into account national and local context. The review provides a focus on the senior leadership options at the Head of Service/Service Director level across Education Services and Children and Families. It also considers current funding arrangements, the value of trading and the work with schools including the relationship with Schools Forum.
2. A summary of the review is provided. There is then a series of sections that contain summary information, evidence considered and possible ways forward.
3. The review was carried out through considering a range of information including national White and Green Papers, consultations and inspection frameworks; Council-wide and local area plans, performance information and trends (including pre-pandemic), current structure arrangements, financial information including budgets and outturns for the last three years, trading income and trends. Ofsted/CQC inspections were reviewed alongside West Berkshire reports including Schools Forum papers as well as internal review reports.
4. A series of interviews took place over the review from August to October 2022 including sessions with the Chief Executive, Cabinet portfolio holder, Executive Director, Heads of Service for Children and Families and Education Services, sessions with Education Services Service Leads, the Service Lead for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding, and with headteachers across all phases of education, including the chairs of primary, secondary and special school headteacher groups. Comments were given in confidence and my thanks to all those in West Berkshire that gave their time and also supported the review by providing information and answering queries.
5. Comparisons were made with other local authorities and an exercise was carried out to determine current market rates for tier 2 and 3 roles covering Education and Children's Services.

B Summary

1. Education Services are part of the local and national system of education and also of support for children and their parents/carers. There are significant pressures of demand, complexity and volume alongside increasing difficulties in recruitment of specialist roles

across public services and wider roles (for example transport drivers) which provide challenges to service delivery and to budgets. This in a wider context of budgets under pressure for the local Council and services as well as at national level. There are also longstanding systemic issues such as those surrounding Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

2. National Government produced a series of White and Green Papers as well as changes to statutory guidance in 2022. The stop-start nature of national government in the summer 2022 does not negate the fact that, at the time this report was written, it seems all will require a response in changing services and budgets over time.
3. West Berkshire Education Services have been working with schools, including Schools Forum to proactively respond to this context. Despite this work the service area and the Council continue to experience pressures. This is not unusual for a Local Authority (LA), particularly in relation to SEND services and placements and school transport.
4. West Berkshire has a track record of strong performance in a range of education indicators. The SEND inspection by Ofsted/CQC 2018 was positive, though some years ago. The recent Safeguarding Inspection of Children's Services West Berkshire 2022 gave an overall judgement of Good. There is much that other LAs would be envious of. However, there are some longstanding areas of relatively poor performance particularly for children vulnerable to poor outcomes (Closing the Gap/Diminishing the Difference). At a national level these are being linked to the "Levelling Up" agenda. There is work to do locally to determine what more can be done collectively and an opportunity to work as a Council with schools and settings.
5. West Berkshire Education Services are funding from the typical sources, predominantly the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), Council core funding, trading and other income such as grants. There is a well-developed approach to the use of the DSG, to de-delegation and also to trading. Senior leaders in Education proactively identify opportunities to use DSG and also to trade. The contribution to services from Council core funding is appropriate. The use of DSG and trading has reduced pressure on Council budgets over a period of time and will continue to do so. Trading is well developed and there has been a proactive approach to develop trading, to address emerging needs of children and pressures for services and school places. However, the overall pressures may be more than can be contained by this approach. This appears to be acknowledged at a national level with regard to the High Needs block in DSG for example.
6. Schools value the relationship with Education Services. There are a range of approaches in schools, working with children and their families. This reduces pressure on Council services and there may be more opportunities to develop the approach with Children and Family Services and others to maximise effectiveness.
7. The relationship between schools and Education Services has been significantly developed over time by the outgoing Head of Service and the current management team and staff. There are considerable strengths to this; it does carry with it a high

degree of personalisation. This will necessarily change with the Head of Service's retirement.

8. There is a perception amongst some of those interviewed outside of Education Services that the Service and the Head of Service offers a higher level of service than could be provided given budget constraints and anticipated pressures going forward. The review found that most of the spend on Education Services was appropriately from DSG, trading and other income. The Council does not provide significant funding from its core budget to any areas that would be unusual compared to other Councils.
9. There continues to be a key role for the LA in leading the education system at a local level. Academisation may be a long-term programme to at least 2030. The DfE is not expecting change to happen quickly and the national system is not set up to achieve this. West Berkshire will need to continue to deliver its LA responsibilities for maintained schools for many years to come unless significant change takes place driven by national government. There appears to be no immediate appetite amongst a number of schools to change their status. There will be a need to continue to provide strategic leadership for the Education System across West Berkshire, with the DfE and in working with schools on the academisation journey if that is the continued direction of travel at a national level. This includes single convertor academies as well as maintained schools. Leadership will be required to maximise benefits for West Berkshire children and plan for any changes to the Council, including budget impact.
10. SEND – addressing increase demand and being inspection ready. This will include maximising existing staffing and resources whilst recognising they will not be sufficient and setting out how to work in this context. Refreshing the SEND Strategy in light of the Green Paper and revised SEND area OfSTED/CQC inspection framework (which appears to be much more demanding), will require significant preparation and ongoing work. The strong involvement of the parent carer forum in West Berkshire is a real strength. There will be work to be done with partners including children's social care which will require dedicated capacity and leadership at both Service Lead and Service Director level.
11. The role of the LA in relation to attendance is changing, there are changes in expectations on LAs for children missing education, elective home education, alternative provision. This appears to be being planned for but will require further attention and development, including how soon-to-be statutory functions will be provided for free to all schools and potentially off-set somewhat with traded activities. This will require leadership and development.
12. The review has looked at different models of senior leadership, the West Berkshire organisational model that was approved in 2019 and the potential to combine functions into one role at Service Director level. Current market rates and roles have been reviewed, alongside structures from other local authorities. There appears to be significant risk in trying to replace the two Head of Service posts with one Service Director. The required span of services aligned with the necessary capacity, experience and skill would make it a highly unusual post at the level that it is placed in West

Berkshire's structure compared to other LAs. The number of direct reports, if kept the same as current arrangements, would make it extremely difficult to deliver effectively. There is not a realistic opportunity of combining responsibilities into fewer posts at the same level of Service Lead.

13. A market rate benchmarking exercise does not suggest that the pay range for a Service Director, even with an additional increment, would match the current salaries being paid for Director of Children roles, or indeed Assistant Director roles in other LAs. It is recommended that two Service Director posts are recruited to, one for Children and Families, one for Education Services. This would provide the necessary capacity and expertise for the organisation, particularly as West Berkshire has an Executive Director structure that covers both the Director of Adult Services and the Director of Children's Services in one post, along with other responsibilities.
14. The location of the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding services and the Children with Disabilities Team was reviewed, and the location is more dependent on effective working relations and capacity of the managers managing them, rather than there being a definitive right answer to this.

C Scope of the Review

1. The Executive Director People commissioned a high-level review of Education in West Berkshire to provide a view on current structure and delivery model within the Education Service and existing levels of value for money. This within the context of the national government White and Green papers related to Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Additional context included the government's agenda regarding "Levelling Up", the County Strategy and the local context which includes high performance in a range of areas, recent good Ofsted inspection outcomes and some longstanding issues for children growing up in West Berkshire including the continued attainment gaps for pupils vulnerable to poor outcomes.
2. The review also focused on current funding arrangements, traded activity, the context of the dedicated schools grant, school budgets and pressures, the high needs block and the strategy to address demand and cost pressures. The review considered, at a high level, the current approach to school performance and the resources being deployed against the national context including the government's aim to have all maintained schools either as academies or with plans to become an academy in a robust multi academy trust by 2030. The relationship between Education Services and schools was considered, alongside the relationship between schools and the Council as a whole.
3. A key aspect of the review was to consider the current senior management structure, in light of current staff at the start of the review moving on. This in light of the longstanding West Berkshire operating model that was approved in 2019. The review was asked to consider the proposal to move to a single Service Director to cover the current Education Services and Children and Families Services, the capacity levels linked to delivery requirements and the current market for senior roles in the sector, alongside

any national trends that could inform West Berkshire's considerations on a future senior management model.

4. The review focus set out by the Executive Director also allowed for any other issues identified through the review process to be considered. This has included the current Quality Assurance and Safeguarding function and the location of Children with Disabilities team.

D Background

1. Role of local authority

The core roles for the local authority in terms of education include:

- the duty to **improve the wellbeing of young children** in their areas and reduce inequalities, including in relation to education
- **ensure there is enough childcare available** for every eligible two, three and four-year-old to access their free childcare entitlements every week
- **ensure there is sufficient high quality school places**. This includes strategic planning, commissioning, coordinating, delivering capital schemes and working with the DfE on delivery where they lead the project
- **a role in school improvement** (NB Academies and maintained schools are responsible for their improvement) including strategic system leadership, risk assess and challenge, enable support for maintained schools, and working with DfE including the Regional Director, Diocesan Boards of Education. This includes challenging academy performance
- **provide fair access** – admissions (including coordination of admissions), Attendance, Fair Access Protocol, Alternative Provision, Children Missing Education, some responsibilities re. Elective Home Education
- **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)** system leadership as well as directly responsible for services to deliver assessment, planning, provision and review of Education Health and Care Plans
- **Arranging and providing transport** in some circumstances
- Providing a **Virtual School for children in care** (recently expanded to children with a social worker)

2. The White Paper "Opportunities for all – Strong schools with great teachers for your child" March 2022 envisaged changes for the local authority including a lead role in providing a stronger and fairer school system, attendance, admissions for example. Once all schools become academies the White paper does not propose a role for school improvement.

3. However, from a local democratic perspective Councillors will still be representing their local people and will probably want to ensure that their local schools are high performing and West Berkshire children are receiving high quality education and doing well. The White paper is silent on this democratic role.

E Context

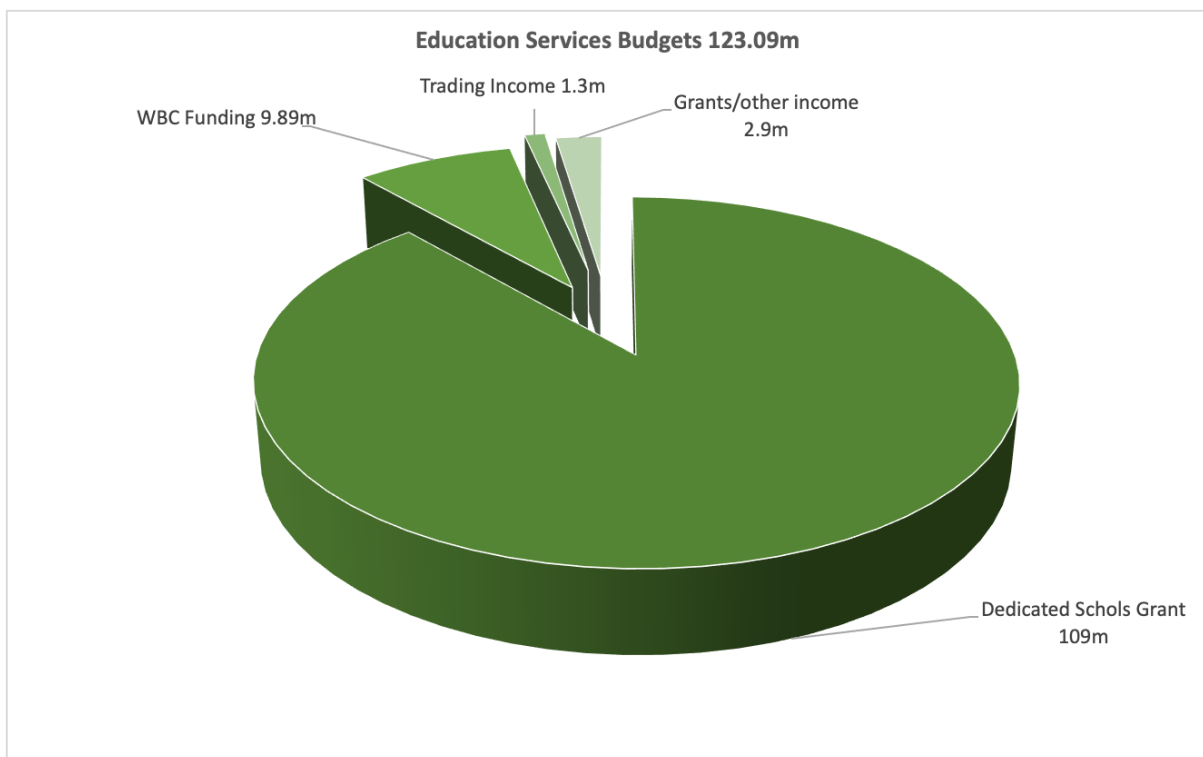
1. The review considered Education in West Berkshire within the national as well as local context including White and Green papers issued in 2022. "Opportunities for all – Strong schools with great teachers for your child" March 2022 set out the government's aspirations for education. Strong schools, great teachers, helping every child fulfil their potential ensuring they receive the right support, in the right place at the right time.
2. This in the context of education recovery and catch-up post-pandemic. What has also occurred is the range of factors contributing to the cost of living crisis as well as longer term issues that were experienced pre-pandemic. These include recruitment and retention of a range of specialist posts such as therapists, educational psychologists, social workers as well as teachers, headteachers and principals. What has also become more acute has been the difficulties in recruiting support staff such as teaching assistants who play an important role in schools, including supporting and enabling the education and development of pupils with SEND – those at the SEN support stage as well as those with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
3. The review found evidence of the difficulties in recruiting adding to the challenges of providing support and education within schools. This could add pressure to the push for different placements if parents/carers do not feel that their child's needs are being met. However, these recruitment difficulties are being felt across the education sector, in special schools as well as mainstream.
4. Pressures in the SEND system are longstanding, including overspends in many LA areas on the High Needs Block, increasing pressure on special school places, independent placements, increases in Tribunals. It appears that post pandemic some of these pressures have intensified and West Berkshire has experienced increases in requests for assessment, increasing pressure for special school places, independent placements and an increasing number of Tribunals. Such issues will also increase the pressure on transport budgets, compounded by other factors such as inflation and difficulties in recruiting and retaining drivers.
5. The SEND Green Paper, launched as a consultation document March 2022, is now with government to set out the next steps. The Green Paper focused on delivering improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND or who need alternative provision. The intention is to build confidence and improve experiences within the government's stated aim of a financially sustainable system. There is widespread recognition that the current arrangements are not financially sustainable nor able to achieve balance against budgets.
6. OfSTED/CQC are finalising a revised local area inspection framework for SEND. The emphasis will be on the quality of delivery for children with SEND (those without EHCPs as well as those with) and their families. The inspection will focus on how services in an area work together to achieve outcomes for children. It will in all probability be a much more challenging inspection framework than the current one, which focused on the implementation of the SEND reforms from 2014 onwards.

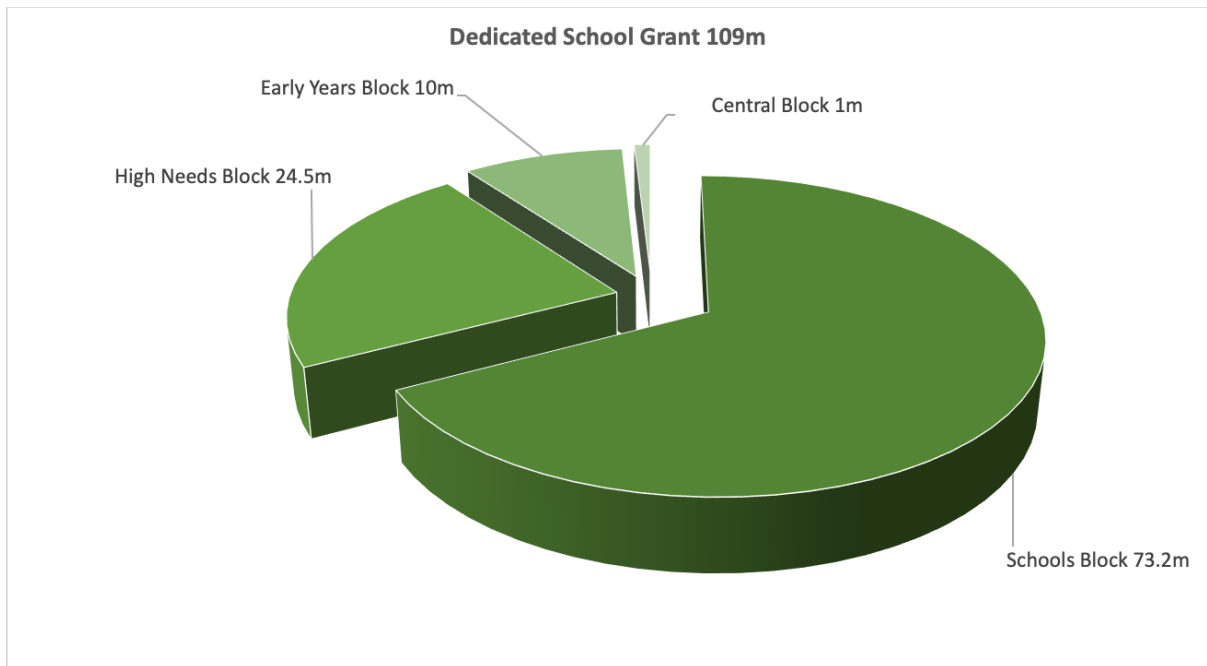
7. The government had launched a major “Levelling Up” agenda and with the change in Prime Minister there may be a change in emphasis. However, the longstanding issue in West Berkshire in terms of narrowing the gap/diminishing the difference appears to be a continued challenge. It is too early to judge whether this has become more of an issue since the summer results have not been verified at the time of this report. But this was an issue that all interviewed agreed was still a key area of focus and some views expressed the worsening picture for families because of the cost-of-living crisis.
8. A key part of the Schools White Paper 2022 was the desire to see all maintained schools become academies or have plans to become an academy within a strong performing multi academy trust (MATs) by 2030. Single academies are encouraged to join MATs, small MATS are being encouraged to become larger. There is a current test and learn initiative within the DfE, set to work with a small number of LAs to see how a LA MAT might work, covering 8-10 schools.
9. What is clear is that this is not a LA running a number of schools and having a direct responsibility and governance relationship. Instead, the proposal sees LA MATs as a concept that fills a gap in the market where all other MAT approaches cannot provide (including faith based MATs for example). A LA MAT would be independent of a local authority, a company limited by guarantee with its own members and trustees. The LA would have limited influence on members and trustees and could influence the educational principles for example. But the initiative is not looking to replicate the old LEA arrangement at a micro level.
10. The role of the LA in relation to attendance is changing. National Government has set out revised arrangements, due to become statutory by September 2023 with the expectation that LAs start to put new arrangements in place before then. There is no new money available, but government is expecting services that were commonly traded by LAs to now be made available free to all schools, including academies. This will require leadership and development and the Service Lead responsible for this area is making preparations.
11. The work area of safeguarding children and families continues to be high profile with increasing complexities and challenges, not least the nationwide difficulties in permanent recruitment of qualified social workers. The Independent Review of Social Care led by Josh MacAlister has produced a report and recommendation which government is to respond to. The national agenda as well as local issues will require significant knowledge, capacity and experience to respond to effectively.

F Findings

F.1 Funding

1. The charts below indicate the current funding of Education Services. The majority of funding is provided through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which is itself broken down into nationally prescribed components.





2. Whilst there may be some views that the Education Service offers a service which might be reduced to save money, in reality much of what is provided in this regard is being paid for by budgets outside of the Council's core funding (with the exception of home to school, SEND and post 16 transport and the Council's contribution to placement costs for example). It is of note that school improvement has had an agreement to be de-delegated as well as traded. It therefore is not coming out of the Council's core budget.

F. 2 Trading and De-delegation

1. Trading forms part of the funding of the service. Examining traded income figures and current performance West Berkshire has a well-developed approach to trading. There has also been use of de-delegation (maintained schools agreeing for money to be passed back to the LA to fund services) including to fund school improvement as grant is being removed by national government.
2. In terms of value for money, schools buying back is an indication of their view on value for money. There may be a risk to traded income as school budgets become squeezed, but Education Services managers are well aware of this and actively working with schools to tailor the service offer, adjust in light of service pressures (such as attendance) and continue to maximise value and income. This is an appropriate and proactive response and also minimises potential impact to Council funding. It can also have additional benefit in terms of job enrichment and aid retention and recruitment, for example for the Educational Psychology Service.
3. The traded services to schools include early years training and support, school improvement and governor services as well as services to support children with additional needs. Over a number of years these services have been tailored and developed to meet the needs of schools. There are a range of packages on offer, including spot purchase opportunities.

4. As an overall position the trading offer is strong with evidence of purchase from maintained and academy schools. The financial figures reviewed indicate that traded services continually cover their costs as well as the income targets. Managers all evidenced a strong awareness of financial implications and were looking for opportunities to develop services further (for example building on the approach of therapeutic thinking), and to continue to cover costs, address any pressures as well as being mindful of the squeeze on schools and the potential decreasing buy-back due to this. This has not yet come through in any great degree to trading this year.

F. 3 Relationship with schools

1. It is evident that there is a strong relationship with schools, between schools and with Education Services. There is also a strong and developed working relationship with West Berkshire Schools Forum. Headteachers spoke of the high value they place on this relationship and on the work of Council staff throughout the pandemic, with a recognition of many staff working above and beyond, constantly being helpful and working with schools to find solutions over the two and a half years.
2. It is probable that this relationship is one of the reasons why, particularly at primary, so many schools are still maintained by the LA. This is set against a lack of perceived benefits of academisation. It is not evident that the new White Paper 2022 has provided any fresh impetus and given the government's own timescales it would be prudent to plan for a significant number of maintained schools continuing to have this status for the medium term.
3. Of note is the work that schools are doing to support children and their families. From the evidence considered in the review schools are providing a range of support which could be labelled early help. They are doing so without Council funding but are probably saving the Council money both in terms of prevention and in keeping families together, lessening the pressures on social care services. This is hard to measure directly but it was evident from both staff and schools that this was valued work that schools got on with, with the support of those service that work closely with them.
4. A range of services promote inclusion and whilst there are clearly pressures and these are sometimes seen as keeping children in mainstream that should be in special, West Berkshire is in a relatively strong place compared to many LAs.
5. The relationship with schools and Schools Forum is evident in the range of services that have been approved as spend to save, using DSG rather than Council budgets including business cases to lessen the pressure for out of county places, reduce the pressure on high tariff services and also increase the support in mainstream. Innovation has taken place and has also attracted funding from health service commissioners in relation to emotional wellbeing support (Emotional Health Academy, run by the Educational Psychology Service). These services are mitigating the pressures in SEND and also for Council budgets, including transport as well as specialist staffing budgets which the

Council are the sole funders of. Examples given included £129k of spend resulting in £1m cost avoidance.

6. Within a context of increasing demand and cost pressures it is evident that the picture for the Dedicated Schools Grant, the High Needs block as well as Council funding would have been significantly worse had not proactive action been taken over a number of years. Action has included putting in place preventative services as well as an agreement to de-delegate funding for some services as well as transferring money from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.
7. These budgets will come under pressure due to the squeeze on Education and Council finances. The Council has a duty to provide and ensure delivery. What can be built on is the development of further spend to save/cost avoidance approaches through refreshing the SEND strategy for example. It is evident that the Service Lead has a range of ideas to develop with parents and carers and with schools. These will look to utilize the DSG in the first instance, rather than be offered as traded services to maximise availability and promote children being able to stay in mainstream schools. The intention is to support children without the need for EHC Plans, or in mainstream without the need for special school placements. It is a forward thinking and positive approach at a time of significant demand. It is also not looking to use Council funding.

F 4 Additionality of the Senior Management Approach

1. The review has found that much of the additionality has been provided through the style and patterns of work of individuals. For example, the Head of Service has been seen to be always available on the phone. The Head of Service has been involved in all head teacher interviews. It is also evident that the individual worked in a very committed way. There appears to be a culture of this with the senior leaders in Education Services which is welcomed by the schools spoken to.
2. New leadership will inevitably do things differently and this will recalibrate the relationship. There may be some friction to this, but it is also a chance to maximise distributed leadership, particularly as the Service Leads are very experienced and appear very competent. Many LAs would welcome having such a management group at a time when it is difficult to recruit skilled, experienced managers in these service areas. This stands West Berkshire in good stead to interpret and respond to the national changes and expectations including
3. What is evident is that there are committed staff to West Berkshire. They take pride in working for the area, working for the children, families and communities and with and for the schools. This also includes going above and beyond, include being available and the hours that they work. At a senior level this is perhaps to be expected, but it is still evident and commendable.

G Structure

The review was commissioned to provide a specific recommendation in respect of the required senior capacity for Education at Assistant Director level in the context of the South

East Employers report i.e. a stand alone role, a combined post with Children & Family Services or any other alternative supported by the findings of the review. This is considered first before moving onto the other requirements from the review regarding service structure and risk.

G 1 Structure – Senior Manager Role

1. This is a key consideration for the review. It was evident in talking to the cabinet member, Chief Executive and Executive Director as well as Heads of Service, Service Leads and some school leaders that the final proposal on the senior management arrangements agreed by the Executive in 2019 required careful consideration. The proposal that was taken forward in West Berkshire provided a leaner management structure overall, being cost neutral and recognising that there would be uplifts in pay for the new posts. The creation of Service Director posts and the deletion of Head of Service posts was to happen over time.
2. The independent review carried out by South East Employers (SEE) contributed to the decision making process and explored a number of structural options. The structure set out the creation of three Executive Directors reporting to the Chief Executive, with 7 Service Directors replacing 13 Head of Service posts. The proposed Service Director (Children and Young People) was to be kept under review and not immediately implemented. The intention was that it include Children and Family Services as well as Education Services.
3. The SEE paper noted that the statutory role of Director of Children's Services could be located in either the Executive Director People role or the Service Director (Children and Young People) which would then attract an additional payment. Transition to the new structure was to take into account the age and experience of the then workforce and move when opportunity arose, including retirement. This has now taken place with the Head of Service, Education Services retiring and the Head of Service, Children and Families taking a job in another LA.
4. Noted in the review was the particular concern expressed at the scale of the role resulting in merging Children and Families and Education in the proposed Service Director. The review recognised the need for further consideration of the proposed Service Director (Children and Young People) and that functional integrity was also important alongside a degree of pragmatism. The review proposed a Service Director with additional responsibilities.
5. At the time of the SEE review in 2019 it was noted that the Head of Children and Families Services had been appointed and that an additional payment had been required to secure appointment. A range of benchmarking information was contained in the SEE report, alongside recognition that LAs did organise themselves differently and that similar jobs could contain variation in duties and also salary. Evident in that review were a range of LAs paying Director of Children's Services at a tier 2 level.
6. To help West Berkshire consider how to take the senior management roles forward the following points are made:

- The Executive Director, People has significant and wide-ranging responsibilities including statutory roles of Director of Adult Services and Director of Children Services. The role necessarily relies on expertise held within roles directly reporting to it, which themselves cover significant areas of Council responsibilities. These areas are often complex, wide ranging and containing a high degree of Council, service, reputation and financial risk.
- The Executive Director and Service Director roles are expected to provide expertise and leadership. Included within this is advice to elected members, particularly the cabinet and portfolio holders. The level of expertise required to fulfil either the Director of Adult Services or Director of Children’s Services is in most local authorities supported by Assistant Directors or equivalents.
- Roles in many other local authorities at the Assistant Director level often cover either Children and Families services or Education Services but not both. They may have elements which fit in either role’s area of responsibility such as early help, children with disabilities. Some elements such as quality assurance, commissioning, performance can sometimes be held in an Assistant Director (or equivalent) role. These roles in themselves rely on posts reporting into them to have specific areas of responsibility and in-depth knowledge and expertise of a range of their service areas.
- The current Heads of Service in West Berkshire for Children and Families and Education Services have 6 and 5 direct reports respectively. If nothing changed at this level, it would leave a Service Director with 11 direct reports. I suggest that for a role at this level this is too many, particularly given the level of complexity, risk and span of each of these service areas.

G 1.2 Financial Implications

Providing a Service Director with 2 deputies that would then have the Service Managers would cost more compared to having two Service Directors

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| Two Services Directors at £94k | £188k |
| One Service Director at £94k, two posts at £82k | £258k |

Benchmarking can be useful to give an indication of what other LAs are doing, and also what the market is like should West Berkshire try to recruit externally. It is recognised that there is a local context to recruitment and to pay, spans of responsibility, target operating models. The following was found as part of this review:

Unitary Local Authorities

Assistant Director (AD) Safeguarding / Education

London Borough of Haringey – AD Safeguarding & Social Care Up to £115k

London Borough of Lewisham – Assistant Director Education Services Up to £110k

Bracknell Forest Council – Assistant Director – Education and Learning £105k - £110k

Herefordshire Council – Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support Up to £99k

Herefordshire Council – Service Director, Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Improvement Up to £99k

London Borough of Lambeth – Assistant Director Family Support and Child Protection Up to £95k (reports into Director of CSC)

North Northamptonshire Council – Assistant Director Education £84,215 - £94,521

Director Children's Services (DCS)

London Boroughs of Richmond and Wandsworth DCS Upto £190k

Bracknell Forest Council – Executive Director of People (DCS and DASS) £165k - £170k

Achieving for Children (AfC) – DCS Up to £160k

London Borough of Lambeth – DCS Up to £160k

London Borough of Tower Hamlets Corporate Director of Children and Culture (DCS) Up to £140k

London Borough of Corporate Director of Children and Families (DCS) Up to £140k

London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham Up to £140k

Reading BC/BFFC Exec Director of Children's, Education and Early Help (DCS) £115,054 – £139,976

North Northamptonshire Council – Executive Director of Children's Services (DCS) Up to £135k

St Helens – Director of Children and Young People's Services (DCS) Up to £130k

Cheshire East Council – Executive Director of Children's Services (DCS) Up to £130k

Recommendation

It is difficult to see how a Service Director (Children and Families) post covering Children and Families and Education Services could be recruited to successfully at a salary of c. £94k. If West Berkshire did manage to recruit it would raise questions about the quality and experience of the individual and may place significant risk to the Council.

It is recommended that two Service Directors are recruited to, one for Children and Families and one for Education Services.

G 2 Potential Structures and Delivery Models and Risks

1. The review was commissioned to consider existing potential structures and delivery models in the context of the key areas of focus with associated recommendations. It was also asked to give an assessment of risk in terms of maintaining delivery against aspiration in the context of proposed changes.
2. Education Services have been well led and well run. There are experienced and dedicated managers at Service Lead level who can provide stability and leadership at a time when the organisation will look to decide what to put in place at tier 3 for Education Services and Children and Family Services. LAs have different structures to discharge their statutory responsibilities and local priorities. Some LAs have developed trading, others have retreated from this. Some now commission services to provide LA functions, maintaining a relatively small commissioning function either within corporate services and/or within children or education services.
3. Given West Berkshire's strong service base, alongside the need to recruit senior leadership it is recommended that any service or structural changes are considered once permanent recruitment has taken place.

4. Two specific areas were identified to be considered during this review and are set out below:

G 2.1 Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service

1. There were questions raised during the review about the location of this service. Alongside this the discussion in the review focused on current service practice, the quality assurance framework, caseloads, learning from audits, approach to learning and the service culture. The review had limited time to look at this area and any further consideration would need more in-depth work, tied into the final decisions regarding senior management roles and any other service and structure considerations taking place in People Services for example.
2. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care led by Josh MacAlister makes significant and contentious recommendations about the role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), including removing the role, increasing the role of advocacy and by implication expecting service managers to pick up work that currently is held by IROs. How this will be responded to by government is unclear and West Berkshire should wait until there is a clear national position before undertaking significant change. Caseloads are on the higher end of what is reasonable and higher than the IRO handbook would expect.
3. The Quality Assurance tool, when used as intended has been highlighted by Ofsted in the last inspections as effective. It is the embedding of the tool to drive forward quality of practice and outcomes for children that was noted as an area to progress. This points not to where the service is located but how the quality assurance work across the whole service area of Children and Families social work is considered, consistently implemented and valued, within the context of a service rated Good by Ofsted, but facing increase demand, pressures and some difficulties in recruitment.
4. Having the service sit outside of Children and Families Safeguarding does take place in some other LAs, for example reporting to a different Assistant Director with safeguarding responsibilities (sometimes across children and adults in terms of quality, performance, safeguarding practice, principal social worker functions), or as part of a commissioning service. Equally some LAs have it reporting directly to a Director of Children's Service, or to an Assistant Director Children and Families. Ofsted can be critical of the location if the service is deemed not to be performing, if it is performing, they seem not to comment on the location. So West Berkshire should focus on making arrangements effective rather than believing a structural solution will simply improve the situation.

G 2.2 Children with Disabilities Team

1. The Children with Disabilities (CWD) team has been within Education Services since 2008. It appears that there have been benefits to this arrangement including greater understanding of legislation, guidance and best practice across CWD and SEND teams, joint working of cases, making the most of children in need reviews, social care input into Education Health and Care Plans. There has also been a joint budget enabling

decisions to be made without differences of opinion on use of funding and funding splits.

2. There may be some disadvantages including the CWD team not feeling totally secure through a matrix management arrangement to cover social care practice and decision making. A number of local authorities have moved their social care teams within their wider social care safeguarding services, often due to concerns over social care practice, including decision making particularly around child protection and safeguarding. It is also done to support court work. A factor to consider is the work that is being generated by the SEND Green Paper and the need for focus and capacity to work through any changes that national government requires. The new area SEND inspection framework will also require capacity to respond to so that West Berkshire is well prepared.
3. This service could sit in another area but consideration on the above points as well as the increasing work required due to the pressures felt in the local area around SEND, preparation for inspection and where other services might or might not be located between Education Services and Children and Families are all factors in determining where best to locate the service. It is recommended that this be considered once permanent appointment is made at the tier 3 level.

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