

High Needs Block Budget 2024/25

Report being considered by: Schools Forum on 11th March 2024

Report Author: Jane Seymour

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

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To seek approval for the proposed 2024-25 HNB Deficit budget.
- 1.2 To reach a decision on how the Schools Block transfer of 0.25% in 2024-25 should be used.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 To agree the HNB deficit budget for 2024-25.
- 2.2 To agree the use of Schools Block transfer for deficit reduction
- 2.3 To include the current Invest to Save initiatives in the HNB budget for now, with the caveat that their continuation will be reviewed at a later stage alongside other non statutory spend in the HNB. These projects include:
 - 0.4 post in the Early Development and Inclusion Team
 - 1FTE SEMH post
 - £90,000 to maintain I-College placements funded from 2022-23

Is the Schools' Forum required to make a decision as part of this report or subsequent versions due to be considered later in the meeting cycle?

Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Implications and Impact Assessment

Equalities Impact:				Commentary
	Positive	No Impact	Negative	

<p>A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?</p>	<p>x</p>			<p>The HNB budget provides services and support to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) including children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) so the impact on children with disabilities is positive.</p> <p>If decisions need to be taken to reduce or cease any non statutory services, this assessment will need to be reviewed.</p>
<p>B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?</p>	<p>x</p>			<p>Impact will be on children and young people with disabilities aged 0 to 25. See above.</p>
<p>Data Impact:</p>		<p>x</p>		
<p>Consultation and Engagement:</p>	<p>Council officers: Jane Seymour, Melissa Perry, Nicola Ponton. There has not been specific consultation with stakeholders about this report, but the revised draft SEND Strategy for 2023-28, which drives HNB priorities and spend, has been thoroughly coproduced with stakeholders.</p>			

4. Introduction/Background

4.1 Setting a balanced budget for the High Needs Block continues to be a significant challenge. The numbers of high needs pupils and unit costs of provision has continued to rise, place funding has remained static despite increasing numbers, and local authorities have taken on responsibility for students up to the age of 25 with SEND in FE colleges without the additional funding to cover the actual cost. The number of children with EHCPs is increasing significantly, despite the threshold for an EHCP remaining the same and being applied robustly. The total number of EHCPs in January 2024 is 1534 compared to 971 in 2019, an increase of 58% in five years.

Year	WBC EHCP Total	% increase	National EHCP Total	% increase
2019	971		353,995	
2020	1034		390,109	
2021	1074		430,697	
2022	1198		473,255	
2023	1322	36%	517,049	46%
2024	1534	58%	Data not yet available	Data not yet available

- 4.2 Up until 2023, the percentage increase in EHCPs in West Berkshire was lower than the national average increase since 2019; 36% increase compared to 46% increase nationally. A comparison with the national level of increase in EHCPs is not yet available for 2024.
- 4.3 The pressure for additional EHCPs has been exacerbated by the Covid pandemic which has caused some children to fall further behind, resulting in more EHC requests. The pandemic has also exacerbated a pre-existing issue with rising incidence of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).
- 4.4 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. A decision was made to set a deficit budget for the first time in 2016/17 and the budget has continued to be overspent each year since that time. The table below sets out the deficit HNB budgets set over the last 8 years:

Financial year	HNB Allocation	Block transfer	Total HNB Deficit Budget set	Difference between budget set and HNB allocation
16/17	-18,118,428	-858,000	21,584,180	2,607,752
17/18	-20,056,233	0	20,312,740	256,507
18/19	-19,958,537	27,000	20,041,180	109,643
19/20	-20,100,067	0	21,748,000	1,647,933
20/21	-21,691,304	-263,285	23,114,920	1,160,331
21/22	-23,631,318	-548,568	25,479,384	1,299,498
22/23	-26,282,076	-300,166	28,241,087	1,658,845
23/24	-28,495,697	0	31,587,958	3,092,261

- 4.5 The pressure on the High Needs Block is a national issue, and many local authorities have significant overspends and have also set deficit budgets. 20 Local Authorities with the highest level of overspend are now part of the Government's Safety Valve Programme. A further 55 Local Authorities are part of the Government's Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme. There are 3 tranches to this programme; West Berkshire is in the third tranche. The DBV programme started in West Berkshire in late summer 2023. A DBV bid for £999,996 was made in December 2023, with funding expected to be released in April 2024 if the bid is agreed. This is one off funding only for 2024-25, although there may be some flexibility to carry forward funds to 2025-26. The DBV programme is the subject of a separate report to the HFG / Schools Forum.
- 4.6 The Local Authority's statutory duties for children with SEND are effectively open ended in that if a child requires an EHC Plan it must be provided regardless of budgetary constraints. Criteria for initiating an Education, Health and Care assessment are robustly applied by the SEN Panel (which has Headteacher representation). However, despite robust management of demand, the number of children with EHCPs continues to rise. The total number of EHCPs in January 2024 is 1534 compared to 972 in 2019, a rise of 58% in five years. A large proportion of this increase in EHCPs is in specialist placements rather than mainstream schools, which is primarily what is driving the HNB budget pressure.

- 4.7 The creation of more local provision for children with SEMH and autism has alleviated some pressures, as local maintained provision is more cost effective than independent and non-maintained provision. The Castle@Theale provision has 18 children on roll, rising to 24 by September 2024 and to its full capacity of 42 by 2027. Every one of these children would have needed to be placed in a non-maintained or independent special. The new Kennet Valley SEMH/Autism provision will open in September 2024 with 6 children, rising to 12 by 2025. It is expected that a further 12 place primary SEMH provision in the west of the Authority will be established within the next five years based upon identified need.
- 4.8 It is critical that mainstream schools receive support to maintain more children with SEND in mainstream settings. This includes children with SEMH and autism. There has been some success in avoiding specialist placements through initiatives such as Therapeutic Thinking, the enhancement of the Autism Team and the creation of an EBSA Team. The (due to be) refreshed SEND Strategy for 2024-29 is expected to propose further measures to increase capacity in mainstream schools, The DBV Programme will include initiatives to support inclusive practice in mainstream schools. (See Section 5 of this report below)
- 4.9 Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 in Appendix A show where the predicted 2024-25 costs exceed 2023-24 budgets.
- 4.10 The current position on the HNB budget for 2023-24 and 2024-25 is set out in Table 1 in paragraph 6.1 below. In summary, the total net shortfall in the 2024-25 HNB budget, is **£17,784,394**. This includes a predicted 23/24 overspend of £4,793,622 and carried forward overspends of £5,070,384 from previous years, totalling £9,864,006 in overspends. Without the carried forward overspends, the shortfall in 24-25 would be **£7,920,388**, ie. the predicted budget demand for 24-25 exceeds the HNB allocation by this amount.
- 4.11 The increase in the estimated budget requirement for 24-25 relates mainly to the following costs:
- Independent and non-maintained school placements – increased budget requirement of **£2,068,880**
 - Mainstream EHCP top ups – increased budget requirement of **£1,272,000**
 - Resourced and academy resourced provision top ups – increased budget requirement of **£1,049,410** (including new resourced units at Westwood Farm and Kennet Valley)
 - FE College top ups – increased budget requirement of **£253,000**
 - Castle@Theale planned increase in numbers in 2024 – increased budget requirement of **£531,881**
 - PRU - increased budget requirement of - **£265,080**
- 4.12 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.

5. Impact of Delivering Better Value Programme

- 5.1 The Council has submitted its bid for £999,996 from the Delivering Better Value Programme in 2024-25. Activity within the proposed DBV Programme will focus on four main areas:

Financial Sustainability

The bid includes a SEND strategic Commissioner and SEND commissioning and Placement Officers who will provide more capacity to negotiate and review placement costs in all non-mainstream placements. This work will also involve an EHCP banding review.

Gap analysis / promotion of the SEND Local Offer

This work strand will focus on further gap analysis, building on the SEND Review already undertaken and the DBV diagnostic exercise, to identify any additional gaps which are impacting on the demand for EHCPs and specialist placements. It will also improve the presentation and content of the Local Offer so that schools, parents and other agencies can more easily access information about services which are ordinarily available to them and how to access them.

Supporting Inclusive Practice

There will be three key aspects to this work strand. All of these areas of activity will be coproduced with schools, parents and other agencies:

- Enhancing emotional / mental health support for children in mainstream schools, which has been identified as a gap leading to placement breakdown. One area of focus will be children who are, or are at risk of becoming, emotionally based school avoidant.
- Improving the multi-disciplinary team response to children who require intervention and who may be at risk of placement breakdown, in order to achieve a swifter and more joined up response. Funding will enhance existing support services.
- Improving transition from early years settings to primary school and from primary to secondary school. These transition points have been identified as key triggers for new EHCPs and for specialist placements. We build on existing good practice and develop protocols / expectations for transition, as well as funding which schools will be able to access (without an EHCP) to support transition.

Sufficiency Planning

This work will build on the 2023 SEND SCAP to develop a long-term sufficiency plan to ensure that development including new places in our maintained special schools, new MLD/SLD provisions in mainstream schools and new SEMH/Autism provision will be adequate to meet demand. A data analyst post will support this work.

- 5.2 The DBV Programme will be led by the SEND Strategic Commissioner / DBV Lead, supported by Programme resource.

5.3 DBV Impact on HNB Spend

The prediction of spend produced by DBV consultants, Newton, by the end of 24-25, is £36 million, assuming no mitigating action is taken. The actual predicted spend in 24-25 is £35.8 million with existing mitigation already in place.

5.4 Newton estimate that without any additional and significant mitigation the spend by the end of 25-26 would be c.£40 million This would equate to an overspend on the HNB equivalent to 37.2% of the HNB (based on 24-25 HNB allocation).

5.5 Newton estimate that with mitigations (including existing mitigations plus DBV mitigations) the spend will be £37.9 million by the end of 25-26. This will still be higher than the HNB budget, but with a reduced in year deficit of £2.1 million.

5.6 By the end of 27-28 Newton estimate that mitigated spend will be £42.3 million compared to unmitigated spend of £48.7M, representing cost avoidance of £6.4 million.

5.7 The reduction in spend anticipated through the DBV Programme will be achieved through

- More children's needs being met without EHCPs
- More children with EHCPs having their needs met in mainstream schools
- More children with EHCPs having their needs met in local maintained specialist provision rather than in independent and non-maintained special schools.
- Reduced unit costs of specialist placements achieved through commissioning and market management.

6. Supporting Information

6.1 The latest estimate of expenditure in the High Needs Block budget for both 2023/24 and 2024/25 is set out in Table 1. The figures are based on current and anticipated numbers of high needs pupils.

TABLE 1	2023/24 Budget £	2023/24 Forecast £	2024/25 Estimate £
Place Funding	6,472,884	6,485,694	6,466,516
Top Up Funding	19,154,710	20,960,580	24,495,604
PRU Funding (top ups only)	1,920,120	2,065,510	2,185,200
Other Statutory Services	2,154,090	2,027,430	2,334,909
Non-Statutory Services	1,664,496	1,573,630	1,712,992
Support Service Recharges	204,160	176,475	213,480
Total Expenditure	31,570,460	33,035,585	37,246,955
HNB DSG Allocation	-28,495,697	-28,495,697	-29,153,266
0.25% Schools Block Transfer	0	0	-335,047
In year overspend	3,074,763	4,793,622	7,920,388
HNB DSG Overspend from previous years	5,070,384	5,070,384	9,864,006
Total cumulative deficit	8,145,147	9,864,006	17,784,394

6.2 Appendix A sets out the detail of the budgets included within the High Needs Block, and the reasons for the pressure on the 2024-25 HNB budget.

7. Proposals

- 7.1 To agree the HNB deficit budget for 2024-25 including the breakdown by cost centre as set out in Appendix A.
- 7.2 To agree the use of 0.25% Schools Block transfer to reduce the deficit.
- 7.3 To continue to address the HNB overspend through regular extraordinary meetings of the Heads Funding Group.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The HNB continues to be under considerable pressure for the reasons set out in this report, due to increased demand for independent and non-maintained special school placements and increased EHCPs in mainstream schools. The DBV programme will reduce the rate at which HNB spend is increasing but will not bring it in line with the HNB budget. Further work is currently being undertaken to identify ways in which spend can be brought in line with budget by 2028. In the interim, the HFG / Schools Forum is asked to approve a deficit HNB budget as set out in this report.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix A – High Needs Budget Detail
- 9.2 Appendix B – Report on Invest to Save Initiatives for HFG / Schools Forum November 2023

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).
- 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 2023-24; no additional funding is made available.
- 1.3 As it is not possible to request increased planned place funding for maintained schools, any increase in place funding needed which is over and above the number of places set out below has been allowed for in the relevant top up budgets, creating additional pressure on those budgets. The actual numbers on roll at The Castle and Brookfields Schools (including children from other Local Authorities) are 163 and 230 respectively, a total of 393. West Berkshire children attending The Castle and Brookfields number 155 and 118 respectively, a total of 273.

TABLE 1 - Place Funding Budget	2023/24 Budget			2024/25 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	393	286	2,860,000	0
Special Schools post 16 (90546) –	79	790,000		79	790,000	0
Resource Units Maintained – pre 16 (90584)	35	242,000	33	35	242,000	0
Special Schools and PRU Teachers Pay and Pension		324,860	n/a		332,516	0
Resource Units Academies – pre 16 (DSG top slice)	102	630,834	112	97	610,000	-5
Mainstream Maintained – post 16 (90551)	6	36,000	16	6	36,000	0
Mainstream Academies – post 16 (DSG top slice)	30	168,000	32	27	162,000	-3
Further Education	129	774,000		129	774,000	0
PRU Place Funding (90320)	66	660,000	84	66	660,000	0
TOTAL	733	6,485,694		725	6,466,516	-8

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 2023/24 and the estimate for 2024/25.

TABLE 2 Top Up Budgets	2022/23 Budget		2023/24 Budget			2024/25	Difference 23/24 budget & 24/25 prediction
	Budget £	Outturn £	Budget £	Forecast £ (Month 9)	Over/ (under) £	Estimate £	
Special Schools Maintained (90539)	4,924,490	5,233,228	5,950,060	5,702,270	-247,790	6,218,339	+268,279
Non WBC special schools (90548)	620,810	524,418	430,660	432,620	1,960	215,295	-215,365
Non WBC free schools (90554)	331,700	535,617	536,480	685,870	149,390	618,116	+81,636
Resource Units Maintained (90617)	314,000	317,407	320,630	660,140	339,510	1,095,932	+775,302
Resource Units Academies (90026)	1,000,000	993,556	985,450	1,276,100	290,650	1,259,558	+274,108
Resource Units Non WBC (90618)	180,640	131,516	119,850	105,640	-14,210	105,638	-14,212
Mainstream Maintained (90621)	850,000	1,182,597	1,142,580	1,668,790	526,210	1,821,000	+678,420
Mainstream Academies (90622)	510,000	640,595	548,920	914,950	366,030	1,142,500	+593,580
Mainstream Non WBC (90624)	161,780	169,046	180,000	147,280	-32,720	140,385	-39,615
Non Maintained Special Schools (90575)	1,114,000	875,863	1,177,630	1,091,690	-85,940	1,423,548	+245,918
Independent Special Schools (90579)	4,656,200	3,683,566	5,566,450	5,413,090	-153,360	7,389,412	+1,822,962
Further Education (90580)	1,016,940	1,149,072	1,212,000	1,674,370	462,370	1,465,000	+253,000
Disproportionate HN Pupils (90627)	42,000	86,321	65,000	200,000	135,000	150,000	+85,000
New SEMH Provision at Theale	775,390	765,987	919,000	987,770	68,770	1,450,881	+531,881
TOTAL	16,497,950	16,288,789	19,154,710	20,960,580	1,805,870	24,495,604	5,340,894

2.2 There will be savings in the budgets for non West Berkshire special schools, non West Berkshire resourced schools and non West Berkshire mainstream schools in 2024-5. The reason for the reduction in costs of non West Berkshire special and

resourced provisions is that we have reduced access to these placements due to increasing demand in the home Authorities.

2.3 There is a saving in the maintained special school budget as The Castle and Brookfields were not able to admit as many new pupils in 2023 as in previous years due to limitations on capacity, although demand remains very high and this has impacted on the mainstream resourced top up budget (creation of new SEND resource at Westwood Farm school) and also on the independent and non maintained special school budgets as some children waiting for special school places have needed to be placed externally.

2.4 However, top up budgets for mainstream schools, resourced schools, independent and non maintained special schools and FE colleges are under pressure for reasons set out below.

2.5 The predictions of cost for specialist placements in 2024-25 take in to account existing pupils, additional 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 2024-25.

2.6 **Independent special schools and non maintained special schools**

The demand for independent and non maintained school placements for children with autism and SEMH continues to rise. There is a national shortage of placements of this type which has meant that we have had several children waiting for placements for some time. Recently, four independent schools for children with these needs have opened in the West Berkshire area: Mile House, The Grange, Haywards Farm and Oaklands. This has meant that children who had already been waiting for a place, or who would previously have had to wait for a place, have all been offered placements, which is positive in terms of meeting those children's needs, but has had a significant impact on the budget. Another issue affecting this budget is the shortage of places at The Castle and Brookfields. Most children waiting for a place remain in their mainstream schools, but in some cases it has been necessary to place children in non maintained or independent special schools. An additional factor is the high level of fee increases on independent and non maintained specialist placements.

2.7 **Mainstream top ups (maintained and academies)**

Due to pressures on the HNB, the value of EHCP funding bands for children in mainstream schools has not been increased for several years. This has resulted in a situation whereby the funding no longer delivers the level of support it should deliver and schools either have to supplement the funding from their own budgets or children receive less support than they should. This is increasingly being raised as a concern by Headteachers and parents and it is arguably also contributing to the demand for specialist placements, as EHCPs in mainstream are being under funded. The increase in cost includes a proposed uplift in banding values by 5%, as well as an increase in EHCPs in mainstream schools.

2.8 **Maintained and academy resourced unit top ups**

The costs of resourced provision will be greater in 2024-25 for two reasons, firstly the creation of new resourced provision and secondly the need to review banding values for HI and PD resourced provision. A new SEND Resource was set up at Westwood Farm School in September 2023. This was created because the number of children with very complex SEND reaching statutory school age and requiring places at

Castle or Brookfields exceeded the number of places available. The unit costs of this provision are relatively high as the children have such complex needs. In addition, revenue funding is needed in 2024-25 for the new SEMH/Autism provision at Kennet Valley which opens in September 2024. Initial set up costs for this provision have been built into the budget, in addition to the revenue budget. The revised bandings for HI and PD resourced provisions, previously agreed by HFG and Schools Forum, have also been included in the budget.

2.9 Free special schools

The free special schools used by West Berkshire Council are primarily schools for children with autism. These schools tend to be used for children whose needs cannot be met by our own resourced ASD provision in mainstream schools. Fees are generally lower than those of independent special schools.

2.10 Further Education

The costs of FE placements for students with SEND in 2023-24 were estimated for budgeting purposes in spring 2023 and an assumption was made that numbers of young people with EHCPs moving in to or remaining at college would reflect patterns in previous years. However, it is not possible to finalise FE numbers until the autumn of each year and this year numbers were higher than anticipated. This has been reflected in the predicted budget for 24-25.

2.11 Castle@Theale Secondary SEMH Provision

Castle@Theale costs will increase in 2024-25 as a further 6 pupils will be admitted. However, the provision is very cost effective compared to alternatives in the independent sector and unit costs are continuing to reduce as the provision fills up.

3. PUPIL REFERRAL UNITS (PRU) – STATUTORY

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

TABLE 3 PRU Budgets	2022/23 Budget		2023/24 Budget			2024/25	Difference 23/24 budget & 24/25 prediction
	Budget £	Outturn £	Budget £	Forecast £ (Month 9)	Over/ (under) £	Estimate £	
PRU Top Up Funding (90625)	830,140	902,512	999,700	1,085,000	85,300	1,139,400	+139,700
PRU EHCP SEMH Placements (90628)	767,020	927,182	920,420	980,510	60,090	1,045,800	+125,380
Non WBC PRU Top Up Funding (90626)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	1,597,160	1,829,694	1,920,120	2,065,510	145,390	2,185,200	+265,080

3.2 The current year budget was based on the previous year's forecast. Schools Forum agreed to a 50% contribution from schools for pupils that they placed. Heads have requested that this contribution remains. Permanent exclusions are funded 100% by

the High Needs Block less the average pupil led funding contribution recovered from schools. The estimate for 24/25 PRU Top Up Funding is based on the profile of pupils at iCollege 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 if they are not able to remain in their mainstream schools. A new provision for pupils with EHCPs was set up in autumn 2019, The Pod, and a further Pod Plus provision was set up in September 2021. These placements are usually more cost effective than independent and non-maintained special school placements. The budget increase includes provision for additional planned places not funded by the ESFA.
- 3.4 A request for additional funding to increase the number of places available at ICollege was agreed by School Funding Forum for financial year 2023-24, this included extending provision at Pod Plus to 18 at the Parson Down Infant site. In addition, 12 places for an intervention provision for Year 7 & 8 students at The Moorside Centre was agreed. Unfortunately, as premises were unable to be agreed in time for staff recruitment this provision was unable to start until January 2024 leading to an underspend in cost centre 90628.

4. OTHER STATUTORY SERVICES

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

TABLE 4 Other Statutory Services	2022/23 Budget		2023/24 Budget			2024/25	Difference 23/24 budget & 24/25 prediction
	Budget £	Outturn £	Budget £	Forecast £ (Month 9)	Over/ (under) £	Estimate £	
Applied Behaviour Analysis (90240)	167,910	246,773	226,660	284,800	58,140	270,416	+43,756
Sensory Impairment (90290)	243,900	250,722	282,340	260,790	-21,550	296,457	+14,117
SEN Commissioned Provision (90577) Engaging Potential	584,480	622,999	636,220	633,250	-2,970	650,834	+14,614
Equipment for SEN Pupils (90565)	15,000	16,231	15,000	15,000	0	15,000	0
Therapy Services (90295)	323,820	329,133	469,700	494,020	24,320	526,082	+56,382
Elective home Education Monitoring (90288)	29,310	26,123	34,320	36,620	2,300	49,480	+15,160
Medical Home Tuition (90282)	386,090	202,609	388,730	216,330	-172,400	381,690	-7,040
Hospital Tuition (90610)	39,950	34,000	36,180	36,180	0	36,180	0
SEND Strategy (DSG) (90281)	60,740	56,157	64,940	50,440	-14,500	69,230	+4,290
Alternative Provision Co-ordinator	0	0	0	0	0	39,540	+39,540
TOTAL	1,851,200	1,784,747	2,154,090	2,027,430	-126,660	2,334,909	+180,819

4.2 **Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) / Personal Budgets**

4.2.1 This budget historically supported 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. There are now few ABA programmes funded and this budget (which will be renamed) supports mainly the costs of children with EHC Plans accessing other bespoke packages where this is the most appropriate and cost effective way of meeting their needs, including SEN Personal Budgets. This budget needs to increase due to increasing numbers of children with SEN Personal Budgets. However, it should be noted that SEN Personal Budgets can be a very cost effective alternative to non-maintained and independent special schools, in particular for children who are emotionally based school avoiders, for whom they are increasingly being requested by parents.

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. The budget will need to be higher next year due to salary increases.

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. An in year increase of approximately £33K was agreed to this contract in 22-23 due to costings not having been revised for some years. The contract ended in August 2023, with the option to extend for a further two years. The contract has been extended for two years at an increased cost of £651,899 per annum, reflecting the need for increased staff ratios and enhanced salaries to address retention and recruitment issues. Premises costs have been added to the contract cost. Even at the higher cost for 2024-25, the unit cost of a place at £48,279 represents good value for money compared to other independent schools for SEMH.

4.5 **Equipment for SEN Pupils**

4.5.1 This budget is 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. It is recommended that the budget stays the same for 2024-25.

4.6 Therapy Services (Contract with Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust)

4.6.1 The therapy services budget covers the costs for children with SEND who have speech and language therapy or occupational therapy or physiotherapy written in to their EHC Plans as an educational need.

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 The HFG / Schools Forum will be aware from previous reports that this service was retendered in April 2023 and is now jointly commissioned with Reading Borough Council and Wokingham District Council. This exercise resulted in an increase in cost due to higher numbers of children with therapies written in to their EHCPs as an educational need (in line with generally higher numbers of children with EHCPs), the need to provide therapies for The Castle@Theale and the need to provide capacity for therapists to assist the Local Authority in defending cases which go to the SEND Tribunal.

4.6.3 In addition, costs in this budget have risen because of the need to provide access to therapies in the new Westwood Farm SEND Resource and in the new SEMH Resource at Kennet Valley.

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 and ensure that all pupils are receiving suitable education. The EHE monitoring sits within the Education Welfare and Safeguarding Service. The Elective Home Education Officer is 0.6fte.

EHE numbers have not reduced (currently 255 pupils are EHE) and whilst the prediction was that once schools opened post COVID that the numbers would drop, this has not been the case nationally nor locally. To manage these cases effectively, engage with the EHE community more effectively, communicate with schools to prevent off-rolling and ensure that pupils are receiving an effective and suitable education the EHE Officer role must increase to full time. This will cost an additional £24,820

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 budget was increased in 2022-23 due to the need to ensure that the Local Authority's duties towards children who cannot attend school for health reasons are fully met. Savings this year are based on recruitment delays. The increase in provision to meet section 19 pupils falls within this service currently and is also on the rise due to increasing mental health issues for our children and young people and prolonged waiting lists for support. Most cases are related to ASD, anxiety and mental health preventing access to school.

4.8.2 Changes have been made to the way in which we meet demand and reduce costs within the service creating an underspend this financial year. The year has been spent moving casual staff on permanent contracts and assessing need which has changed. With the emphasis on EHCP pupils and highly anxious pupils to support, the work not

only includes 'teaching' but re-engaging and integration, the skills for which have not been within the team. We have recruited a Deputy SENCO who qualifies in March and are buying in Emotional Health support to increase the packages of support available to pupils and encourage reintegration to school.

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 2024-25 budget remains the same as 2023-24. Between December and April we will be carrying out a piece of work in this area to assess the quality of education provision in our hospital Tier 4 placements and to build better working relationships and ensure value for money.

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.

4.11 Alternative Provision / EOTAS Coordinator

4.11.1 It is proposed that an additional post of Alternative Provision / EOTAS Coordinator is funded in 24-25 (part year costs shown from September 2024) in order to reduce pressure for specialist placements for children who have ceased attending school due to EBSA. Currently EBSA is a key driver of spend on independent specialist placements. This post would provide capacity to set up and oversee alternative packages of education where this is an appropriate alternative to a specialist placement. In many cases a package of support would meet with parental preference, potentially meet the child's needs better than a school placement and could be considerably more cost effective. The only current barrier to such arrangements is lack of capacity to organise packages and ensure they are suitably monitored.

5 NON-STATUTORY Services

5.1 **Table 5** details the non-statutory service budgets for 2023-24, predicted outturn, and estimates for 2024-25.

5.2 The table shows the budget for these services in 2024-25 assuming that the services continue and there are no changes to staffing levels. However, consideration is currently being given to funding of non statutory services by officers and members of the Heads Funding Group. Should decisions be made to reduce or cease any non statutory services, the 2024-25 HNB budget will be adjusted accordingly.

5.3 Table 5 currently includes ongoing funding for the "invest to save" initiatives agreed in 2022-23 and rolled forward in to 2023-24, for an additional 0.4 teacher in the EDIT Team, an additional SEMH practitioner and extra I-College places. These projects will be considered as part of the review of non statutory services.

TABLE 5	2022/23 Budget		2023/24 Budget			2024/25	
Non Statutory Services	Budget £	Outturn £	Budget £	Forecast £ (Month 9)	Over/ (under) £	Estimate £	Difference 23/24 budget & 24/25 prediction
Language and Literacy Centres LALs (90555)	135,740	187,553	161,690	161,690	0	171,840	+10,150
Specialist Inclusion Support Service (90585)	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	0	50,000	0
PRU Outreach Service (90582)	61,200	61,200	61,200	61,200	0	61,200	0
Cognition and Learning Team(90280)	334,140	328,257	346,350	351,350	5,000	363,830	+17,480
ASD Advisory Service incl HLTA Support (90830)	235,640	215,356	233,190	237,190	4,000	248,800	+15,610
ASD Fund - Additional support (90830)	52,690	52,690	52,690	52,690	0	52,690	0
Therapeutic Thinking post (90372)	55,900	52,457	58,590	42,000	-16,590	69,330	+10,740
Vulnerable Children (90961)	179,400	178,980	179,400	124,400	-55,000	179,400	0
Early Development and Inclusion Team (90287)	62,505	60,273	64,040	65,600	1,560	68,950	+4,910
Dingley's Promise (90581)	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	0	35,000	+5,000
Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) (WBC led)	123,840	123,879	134,840	125,250	-9,590	139,240	+4,400
Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) (school led)	110,966	99,864	110,966	110,966	0	110,966	0
Invest to save projects. 2022-23							
0.4fte additional support EDIT team	26,390	26,390	26,390	26,390	0	28,186	1,796
0.4fte additional support Speech and Language	31,324	7,665	23,660	12,290	-11,370	0	-23,660
SEMH Practitioner	41,490	14,497	41,490	32,620	-8,870	43,560	2,070
Extension of i-college	90,000	0	90,000	90,000	0	90,000	0
TOTAL	1,621,225	1,489,061	1,664,496	1,573,630	-90,866	1,712,992	48,496

5.4 Language and Literacy Centres (LALs)

5.4.1 The LALs 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.

5.4.2 The increase proposed to the LAL budgets relates to increases in salary costs.

5.5 **Specialist Inclusion Support Service**

5.5.1 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.

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

5.6 **PRU Outreach**

5.7.1 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.

5.7 **Cognition and Learning Team**

5.7.1 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.

5.7.2 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.

5.7.3 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.

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

5.8 **Autism Team**

5.8.1 The Autism Team provides advice, support and training for mainstream schools on meeting the needs of children with Autism. The purpose of the service is to enable children with autism to be successfully included in mainstream schools wherever possible.

5.8.2 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 autism.

5.8.3 The increase in cost represents teachers' salary increases, pension and NI.

5.9 Vulnerable Children

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

5.9.2 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.

5.9.3 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. This increase was further extended in 2021-22 and 2022-23 and was agreed as a permanent addition to the HNB budget, along with the Therapeutic Thinking post.

5.10 Early Development and Inclusion Team

5.10.1 The service comprises of 1.8 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.

5.10.2 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.

5.10.3 The service has been reduced in size in recent years from 3.4 to 1.8 staff. The service has a waiting list due to increased demand and reduced capacity.

5.10.4 An additional 0.4 post was agreed as an invest to save initiative in 2022-23 and carried forward to 2023-24. The impact of the additional resource is covered in Appendix B.

5.11 Dingley's Promise

5.11.1 Dingley's Promise is a charitable organisation which provides Ofsted registered early years education 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 years settings, where experience and expertise in SEND can vary greatly. Parents are able to take up their early years 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.

5.11.2 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.

5.11.13 Dingley's Promise has made a request for additional resources due to ongoing viability issues as a result of reduced charitable income and some large grants coming to an end. Their annual running costs are £240,000 and they receive £100,000 in income from the Council including early years place funding, funding for one to one support for individual children and the £30,000 annual grant from the HNB. The balance of £140,000 has to come from fund raising. The organisation has reported reduced ability to achieve income through fund raising as well as an anticipated reduction in income in 2024-25 due to a large Children in Need grant coming to an end. The West Berkshire centre is running at a loss and effectively being subsidised by centres in other areas.

5.11.14 Dingley's Promise have negotiated with the Greenham Trust that if the Council increases its grant, Greenham Trust will match fund the increase and the existing £30,000 grant. This has been verified by Greenham Common Trust who have committed to taking this to their board for approval in March 2024.

5.11.15 It is therefore proposed that the grant is increased from £30,000 to £35,000. This will trigger £35,000 in match funding from the Greenham Trust, increasing Dingley's Promise's income in 2024-25 by £40,000 in total. Dingley's Promise provides an essential service in West Berkshire for children under five with very complex needs. If the service ceased to be viable, there would be an increase in demand for maintained special school places, which are already in short supply, and there could be increased pressure for non maintained / independent special school placements.

5.12 Invest to Save projects

5.12.1 Invest to Save projects in 2022-23, rolled forward to 2023-24, included a 0.4 FTE post in the EDIT Team, the early years training project, an SEMH practitioner and PRU places. The impact of these projects has been set out in a previous report to the HFG / Schools Forum. See Appendix B.

5.12.2 These projects have been included in the budget but It is proposed that their continuation is considered as part of the review of funding of non statutory services.