

---

# Delivering Better Value Programme : Update

---

**Report being considered by:** Extraordinary Schools' Forum on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024

**Report Author:** Hester Collicutt

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

---

## 1. Purpose of the Report

West Berkshire has been successful in securing a grant of £1 million, to be used over one calendar year from 1 April 2024 to deliver a transformation programme for Special Educational Needs/Disabilities against a series of key performance indicators, which shall be monitored by the Department for Education.

This report will provide an update on the Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme and its impact on the SEND service in West Berkshire, improving outcomes for children and young people.

In addition, the DBV Programme will achieve substantial cost savings to be made against the High Needs Block (HNB) to reduce the deficit over a 5-year cycle, through a sustained programme of change.

## 2. Recommendations

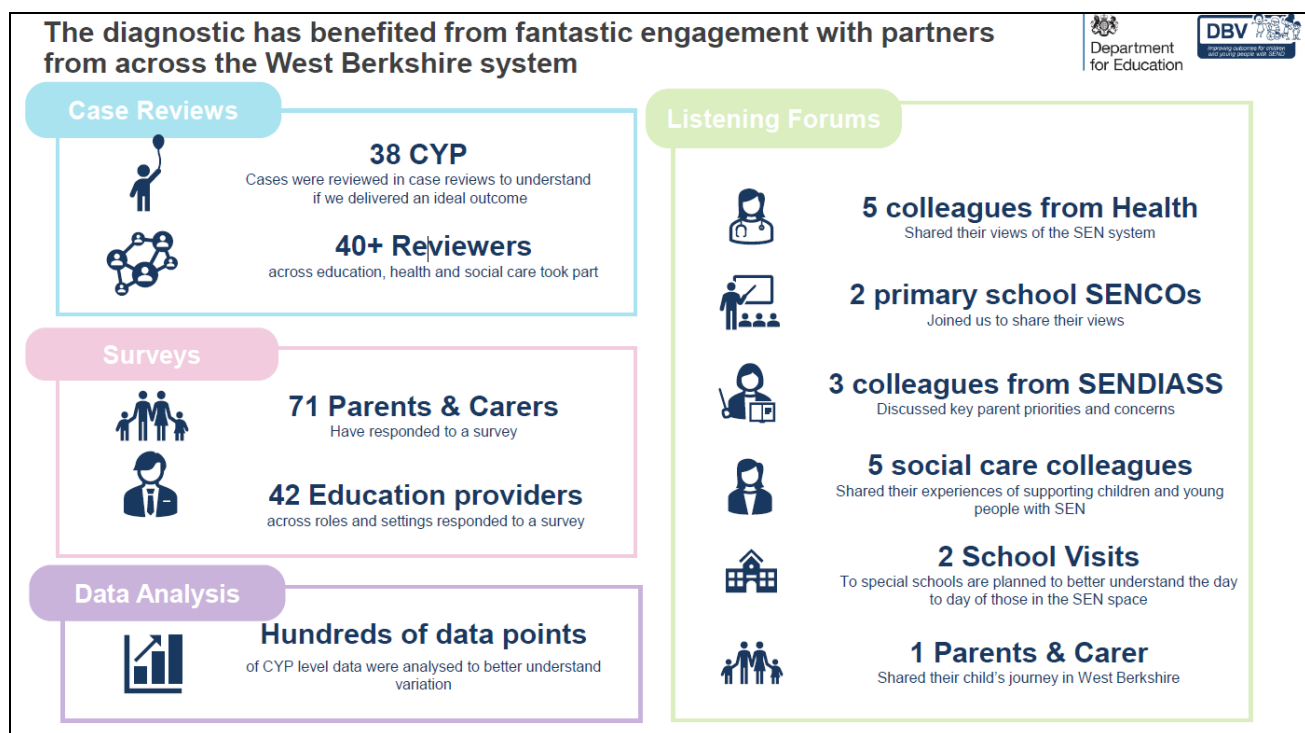
- 2.1 Commit to supporting wider stake holder engagement across education, social care services, Health and Local area partners to ensure that the programme has the impact required to improve outcomes for CYP with SEND in West Berkshire.
- 2.2 Ensure that S151 Officer and Executive are sighted as early as possible, on potential recommendations in relation to the overspend on the HNB and potential additional risks of unmitigated expenditure over the next 5 years.

## 3. Introduction/Background

- 3.1 The DBV Programme will be a core element of the overall SEND Strategy 2023-2028:
  - It will focus on reducing statutory spend through early identification of need and targeted intervention whilst at SEND support.
  - Reducing the requirement for Education, Health, and Care (EHC) assessments as presenting needs will be better addressed in a timely way.
  - Increased capacity will be developed in specialist-maintained school provision, resourced provision and alternative provision thereby reducing the need to place most CYP in Independent non maintained special schools (INMSS). This will reduce expenditure of the High Need Block by creating increased financial stability as unit costs will be controlled and sustainability of appropriate, needs led provision.

## 4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 During the diagnostic Module 1 and 2 of the DBV programme, which was carried out from July 2023 – December 2023, data analysis combined with 38 detailed case reviews, parental and education providers surveys provided a rich resource of information to inform a DBV programme to deliver against high impact areas.



- 4.2 Findings from Newton Europe's Module 1 initial evaluation of data (July 2023) indicated that High Needs Block (HNB) expenditure has increased by 47% in 5 years, driven by 33% EHC caseload increase in 5 years and a unit cost rise of 2 % over the same period. However, Berkshire has the lowest number of EHC Plans per population when compared with statistical neighbours. It has also seen more measured growth of EHC Plans. By supporting early identification and inclusive practice in mainstream provision at an earlier stage, then needs are addressed at SEND support, without the requirement for an EHC assessment, unless needs are persistent and long term.
- 4.3 Increased demand for statutory assessments occurs at transition points.
- The majority of CYP with EHCPs start their provision in mainstream during primary or secondary transition years. These two groups account for 62% of the new EHC Plan cohort.
  - Among all mainstream new EHC plans, ASD, SEMH and SLCN are the main primary needs, accounting for 69% of all starts.
- 4.4 Maintained Special Schools (MSS) are forecasted to remain as one of the two biggest areas of spend, driven solely by unit cost growth due to capacity constraints in place.

Benchmarking:

- West Berkshire ranks in the **top 20%** amongst the DBV local authorities for MSS unit cost and has the largest unit cost compared to its statistical neighbours.
- West Berkshire supports fewer EHCPs in mainstream compared to most statistical neighbours.
- Mainstream in comparison to Special has accommodated more CYP whilst experiencing the smallest increase in unit cost.

- 4.5 38 detailed case reviews were undertaken by education staff, health and therapies practitioners, social care professionals and wider local area partners to determine whether these CYP required an EHC plan to meet their outcomes and if the setting they were in supported them meeting their outcomes best.
- 84% of cases, it was agreed, required an EHC plan to access appropriate support.
  - Of the cases which were in INMMS, just under half had needs which could have been met in an appropriate Resourced provision, if a place had been available and a smaller portion in maintained special, if a place had been available, with the associated cost differential.
- 4.6 Independent Non-Maintained Schools' (INMSS) unit costs have seen a growth of 5% over 5 years with a 3.6% caseload increase. However, due to current capacity constraints in MSS and Resourced Provision, demand is increasing.
- 4.7 Co- production work with parents/carers/children and system partners has shown that they would benefit from better communication about the local service offering. This would ensure timely intervention is provided for CYP who need it. DBV activities highlighted that most partners felt there was a huge amount of support on offer, but the challenges were largely around understanding how and when to access which services. Parents told us it was hard "to see the wood for the trees." Social care and SENDIASS, professionals working in this space every day, echoed this and said even they found it hard to navigate when and how to access support. When people do access the support, they think it is relatively effective, therefore the priority is to improve the accessibility of the local offer and develop a communication strategy that supports parents/carers and local partners in accessing advice and support as quickly as possible.
- 4.8 The opportunities identified through DBV activities indicated that:

---

*Ensuring the right level of support for the child's or young person's goals and aspirations at the start and throughout provision would improve outcomes irrespective of whether they had an EHC plan or not, support being needs led rather than diagnosis led.*

## 5. Options for Consideration

- 5.1 Through consultation and co-production with service users and Local Area Partners, during phase 1 of the DBV Programme priority areas have been identified: -
- **Gap analysis / promotion of Local Offer.**
  - **Improved sufficiency planning/ increased data capacity.**
  - **Changes to commissioning including a banding review and review of existing placements.**
  - **Initiatives to support inclusive practice in mainstream schools.**
- 5.2 By increasing the capacity of mainstream schools to meet presenting SEND needs through ensuring appropriate levels of funding through a banding review and providing skills development for existing staff will allow for a sustainable model of SEND support and funding for EHC plans.
- 5.3 Decision making is robust as evidenced by the lower percentage of EHC plans issued. However, The DBV Grant will allow for a banding review to be undertaken to ensure parity and alignment with local and national funding arrangements supported by reviewed/refreshed decision-making processes to ensure transparency, consistency, and value for money.
- 5.4 Supporting the co-production of a Transition Support Programme, led by schools, will ensure provision is available for the most vulnerable without the need for access to enhanced support secured through an EHC plan. The Transition Support Programme will address the concerns of parents and children and ensure a good transition to mainstream happens, i.e. between key stage 2 and 3 and early years to reception. In addition, the Local Authority will also deliver the Whole School Mental Health Project to address non-attendance through emotional based school avoidance and additional mental health difficulties, with a particular focus on Transition years.
- 5.5 By upskilling staff in mainstream through targeted professional development in SEND and improving access to specialist services when needed, the capacity of mainstream to meet more complex needs is supported.
- 5.6 Supporting schools in accessing a co-ordinated SEND support services offer for children who are at risk of placement breakdown will ensure targeted, bespoke intervention is available to meet needs more effectively at the right time.
- 5.7 The DBV Grant will be used to enable Strategic and Operational commissioning and procurement practices to be updated. In addition, a review of funding arrangements on all placements (a joint children's services piece of work across social care and education) will be led by a newly appointed strategic commissioner, the DBV Programme Director. This work will be supported by a robust sufficiency strategy to reduce the requirement for INMSS provision by ensuring increased capacity in MSS or Resourced Provision to meet more complex needs.

- 5.8 By undertaking a review of sufficiency of provision and commissioning arrangements, capacity of local provision can be responsive to changing trends in future demand therefore more children would be accessing suitable provision and appropriate placement types in a planned and co-ordinated way across their whole educational journey including into post 16 provision and transition into adulthood. This would reduce the need to place in high cost independent non maintained specialist provision which in turn would reduce the pressure on the high needs block and develop capacity in the local education estate to ensure a sustainable model of provision.
- 5.9 In West Berkshire, longer term alternative provision has been successfully developed to meet the needs of CYP with SEMH both in primary and secondary and this shall be part of a wider Alternative Provision usage to support mainstream in meeting need. Early identification in early years with access to targeted, multiagency support and funding will reduce the requirements for EHC assessments (between 2018-2022 there was a 73% increase in requests from early years). In mainstream schools, better access to meeting the needs of CYP at SEND support in timely way will reduce demand for EHC plans.

## 6. Proposals

- 6.1 Four workstreams have been identified to address the priority areas above. The workstreams meet monthly and report into the DBV Task Group which monitors progress against KPIs and financial impact of the workstreams. The DBV Task Group monitors progress and reports to the SEND Strategic improvement Board and Schools Forum/Heads Funding Group.

GAP Analysis to inform local provision/need	Ensuring Sufficiency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mapping of exiting services to ensure clear pathways for referral. This will be communicated on a revised and updated co-produced Local Offer.</li> <li>The creation of a provision and inclusivity dashboard will allow for monitoring of progress and transparency for service users.</li> <li>Identification of best practices and communication across the systems.</li> <li>Identifying GAPS in universal and targeted service offer to allow for commissioning or co-commissioning further support for schools and settings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic and Operational commissioning and procurement practices updated.</li> <li>Quality assurance of AP provision</li> <li>Stimulation of market to ensure appropriate Local Provision in place.</li> <li>Review of funding arrangements on all placements - joint children's services piece of work across social care and education - led by strategic commissioner.</li> <li>Joint funding/commissioning arrangements.</li> <li>A robust sufficiency strategy in place supported by revised data analysis.</li> </ul>
Financial Sustainability	Supporting Inclusive Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities to ensure that there is access to sustainable funding to meet the needs locally in a timely way.</li> <li>A banding review to be undertaken to ensure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whole School Mental Health Project - offering this to all schools in West Berkshire for 1 year and to evaluate impact.</li> <li>An Audit schools' additional SEND training</li> </ul>

<p>parity and alignment with local and national funding arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review decision making processes to ensure transparency, consistency, and value for money.</li> <li>• Review the use of element 2 funding in schools and settings.</li> </ul>	<p>needs through surveys, focus groups and case studies to create a plan to meet gaps in existing SEND training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on supporting transitions into mainstream (Transitions Support Programme) to be led by schools and co-produced in clusters.</li> <li>• Ensure existing SEN support teams work in a more coordinated way (e.g. with a single point of access triage requests to sign post, monitor and moderate demand)</li> <li>• Multi-disciplinary teams to support schools – to be coproduced and enhance outreach support and guidance from special schools, explore developing resourced provision outreach and further utilisation of existing services (Specialist Inclusion Support Service / SISS) with particular focus in transition into key stage reception/ 1 and into key stage 3.</li> <li>• Enhance special school outreach service (Specialist Inclusion Support Service / SISS)</li> <li>• Increase the Early Development and Inclusion Team (EDIT) &amp; Autism Team</li> </ul>
--	---

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 As of January 2024,<sup>1</sup> the unmitigated prediction of HNB spend in 2024-25 is £40,895,301 against a budget of £29,488,313 (including Schools Block transfer). Combined with existing deficit from previous years of £9,528,516, gives a potential cumulative deficit of £20,939,248 at the end of 2024-2-255.
- 7.2 The DBV programme will focus on reducing statutory spend through early identification of need and targeted intervention whilst at SEND support. This will reduce the requirement for EHC assessments as presenting needs will be better addressed in a timely way. In addition, increased capacity will be developed in specialist-maintained school provision thereby reducing the need to place CYP in Independent non maintained special schools.

## **8. Heads’ Funding Group Recommendation**

- 8.1 This has been discussed at Heads Funding Group, most recently on 17 April 2024.
- A standing item to be added to the work programme for each meeting of the Schools’ Forum, to enable high level information on the programme and progress to be provided in a public setting.

<sup>1</sup> West Berkshire – Designated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan January 2024.