
Delivering Better Value Programme : Update

Report being considered by: Schools' Forum 15th July 2024
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Item for: Discussion **By:** All Forum Members

1. Purpose of the Report

This report is provided to Schools' Forum to provide an update on the Delivering Better Value Programme (DBV) and its impact on the SEND system in West Berkshire, improving outcomes for children and young people.

2. Introduction/Background

The quarterly reporting cycle to the DfE is as follows: -

- April to June by 5th July
- July to Sept by 4th October
- October to December by 10th January
- January to March by 4th April

This is the submission to the Department of Education for 5th July 2024.

3. Supporting Information

3.1 Provide a summary of progress to date in relation to the agreed implementation plan

Since April DBV Programme and its governance has become fully aligned and incorporated into the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024 to 2029 to ensure the overarching delivery of the "Innovation in SEND" programme in West Berkshire. It has provided the impetus for a transformational piece of work which will have a significant legacy consequence.

The Parent and Carer Forum is engaged at a strategic level, sitting on the SEND Strategic Improvement Board (SSIB) which is chaired by the Executive Director of Children's Services, and whose membership includes the Chief Executive for West Berkshire, the Lead Council Member for Education, Chief Nursing Officer for the ICB and the ICB Director (Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire -BOB).

West Berkshire is also working closely with neighbouring authorities. For example, in June 2024 West Berkshire has formally requested to join the Alternative Provision

Framework led by Brighter Futures for Children (Reading) to address sufficiency and quality of Alternative Provision, developing capacity in this area.

DBV working groups meet monthly to scrutinise the delivery of the programme and regular reports are submitted to Schools Forum and Heads Funding Group. A wide Communications plan is being launched in July 2024 to ensure developments in SEND are broadcast to families, schools and wider Local Area Partners through a blog and alternative methods of communication.

Key temporary posts have been filled to manage the delivery of the programme, increasing the capacity of the existing teams whilst system changes are implemented. However, some recruitment has been more difficult and has caused delay e.g. the “Whole School Mental Health Project” where the project has been delayed by 5-6 months. West Berkshire is now formally requesting to extend this programme beyond the end of March 2025 until August 2025, thereby using allocation of the DBV grant in this area, beyond the March 2025 deadline.

The Transitions Support Programme has this term, supported Early Years transition into F2, for September 2024. Impact is currently being evaluated, with a view to extending funding, if impact demonstrates successful early identification and successful support into Foundation mainstream provision.

The Key Stage 2/3 programme is being co-produced with schools (Primary and Secondary SENCOs and Year 7 teachers).

Work on SEND Data Management is informing the development of a Sufficiency Plan, data dashboards and a clearer financial overview of placements in Independent non-maintained special schools (INMSS). This is bringing together teams from within the Council to align their work and is informing sufficiency, financial scrutiny, and commissioning developments.

The first three months of the DBV Programme has been focused on ensuring systems are in place to drive sustainable, evidenced based improvements in supporting children and young people with SEND, delivering cost effective solutions that meet SEND locally but that are co-produced with local partners and families. Promoting parent /carer engagement remains a priority and therefore the Local Authority has used DBV funding to engage the Coram Programme which supports parental champions who will build parental confidence in the SEND system

3.2 Grant expenditure summary

3.21 The actual spend on the DBV Programme to 28th June 2024 is £113,506. The actual spend is lower than predicted due to several factors:

- Delay in appointing to Service Director - Delivering Better Value (Strategic Commissioner)
- Delay in appointing to Commissioning Consultant Lead (Commissioning Officer)

The costs for these roles will be apportioned across the rest of the programme, as appropriate.

- 3.22** Delay in commencement of the Whole School Mental Health Project. Initially this should have commenced in April with the appointment of Educational Psychologists to deliver the project. Issues in management changes in the Educational Psychology Service and delays in recruitment have delayed the project by 5/6 months. Plans are in place to appoint to these posts by September 2024 and they will be for a year's term (until August 2025) with agreement of the DfE.
- 3.23** There has also been a delay in recruitment of a project co-ordinator (administrative & communication support), It is intended that this post will be filled by the end of July 2024.
- 3.24** The SEND Placement Officer post is held, whilst awaiting the sufficiency plan to be finalised (August 2024). This will then dictate what support will be required from this role.
- 3.25** Work around the increase in capacity of support services and the development of a transition support programme have started, but these plans are evolving and more clarity on the nature of the spend attached to these programmes will be available by the second quarter.
- 3.26** N.B. There are additional costs in relation to finance support as the DBV work is being carried out over and above current hours.
- 3.27** The DBV team reviewed the clawback request presented to the Schools Forum in December 2023 and made a recommendation that this be re-considered by the Schools Forum meeting in June 2024.

Balances over 10% have been agreed to be clawed back from schools, subject to a review on current commitments. The value of this is currently unknown but will be added to the deficit management template once confirmed. The amount is likely to be confirmed by the end of July 2024.

4. Workstream: Clear communications with families and wider local area partners to support access to services and the SEND system.

4.1 Summary

This workstream is focusing on a cross-agency gap analysis in relation to the Universal and Targeted Offer in West Berkshire in conjunction with health and social care colleagues – e.g. review of the support available around Autism, pre and post diagnosis i.e. needs rather than diagnosis led access to provision. This is being undertaken through a “Balance System” framework approach which in turn may lead to opportunities for joint commissioning where gaps in service are identified. Mapping pathways to access services is being undertaken during this analysis. There is significant appetite for this work across the Local Area although the scope of it, and the variety of service providers involved, has meant that the work will not be completed until July/August 2024 (1/2 month/s delay).

The Parent/Carer Forum (PCF) does have representation on the SEND Strategic Improvement Board, however due to the current very low numbers in the Forum (fewer than 15 members at present), the opportunity for co-production remains extremely limited and there are not enough members to participate in Task Groups. West Berkshire is working with “Genuine Partnerships” (developed out of Rotherham PCF) on co-production activities with new PCF members. The PCF Forum is attending Hub activities throughout the summer to engage with families and drive membership development. This is being supported by staff from West Berkshire. The PCF is hosted by “Swings and Smiles”, a charity providing support, friendship and play for children with special needs and their families in West Berkshire.

A data dashboard is being developed to inform the SEND Strategic Improvement Board in September 2024.

4.2 Workstream delivery confidence RAG rating: AMBER/GREEN

4.3 Evidence and progress

West Berkshire has formerly requested to join Brighter Futures for Children (Reading) Alternative Provision Framework, which will be published on the Local Offer in August/September 2024.

To further support communication with parents and carers, West Berkshire has used DBV funding to invest in the Coram Parent Champion Programme. The Parent Champion Programme will extend our ability to engage with parents and carers during the remaining months of the DBV programme supporting the Gap Analysis /SEND Local Offer and the Inclusive Practice task groups.

Beyond the lifetime of the DBV Programme, setting up a Parent Champion Programme in West Berkshire will create a network of parent carers volunteers that can be used to share and receive information and increase participation around multiple relevant service developments. For example, increasing take up of childcare entitlements for disadvantaged 2-year-olds, increasing access to early intervention services at Family Hubs for vulnerable families, increasing access and awareness of public health issues such as childhood immunisations.

West Berkshire has developed a Communication Plan to launch DBV activity and the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024- 2029 under the headline “Innovation in SEND”. The SEND Blog is launched in July and will provide updates for parents and the wider community and opportunities to participate in specific projects e.g. The development of the Local Offer.

4.4 Measuring impact

It is too early in the programme to measure impact in this area.

4.5 Has there been any slippage in delivery plans?

Delay in PCF engagement in task groups, due to capacity and limited numbers in PCF currently.

Mitigation - Joining Coram Programme, supporting PCF engagement with family Hubs, Support of Participation and Engagement Lead, development of SEND Blog to highlight key information for PCF.

The Local Offer in West Berkshire is changing platforms, and this may slightly delay the improvement and updating schedule of the Local Offer. Work is still going on to improve the content of the Local Offer and it is hoping that any technical delay will be negligible.

5 Workstream: Enabling settings, schools and colleges to meet the diverse needs of their communities locally.

Workstream summary

This workstream has three focus areas:

5.1 Ensuring Sufficiency

This task group is ensuring data used to inform the SEND Sufficiency Plan is accurate. The First draft of the SEND Sufficiency Plan is due in July 2024 and will provide the evidence and inform the business case for the development of further SEND provision in West Berkshire.

This group is also reviewing the commissioning frameworks for Independent Non - Maintained placements and Alternative provision. An outcome of this work is that in June 2024 West Berkshire has formally requested to join the Alternative Provision Framework led by Brighter Futures for Children (Reading) to address sufficiency and quality of Alternative Provision, developing capacity in this area.

Mitigations identified in Annex 1 of the Deficit Management Plan (DMP) regarding SEND placement development is specialist provision is currently on the risk register as this expansion plan may no longer be available, following the anticipated academisation of a local special school. The group is identifying further options for developing SEND provision in local mainstream schools and an options paper will be available for consideration in August/September 2024.

5.2 Financial Sustainability

This Task group is undertaking the Statutory Decision-Making Review in July and August. It is reviewing all Terms of Reference and documentation for all statutory decision-making panels and relevant supporting data and external information e.g. previous internal audits. Decision making around INMSS placements will also be under review whilst considering appropriate Commissioning Frameworks.

Phase One of the Banding Review will be completed by 31 August 2024 and will include mapping current activity, benchmarking across other LAs, analysing data and information, reviewing other models, and agreeing recommendations to take forward.

5.3 Supporting Inclusive Practice

This task group is focusing in two key areas of development, the Transitions Support Programme and the whole school Mental Health Project.

The Transitions Support Programme from Early Years to F2 has piloted additional enhanced support since May 2024 using DBV Funding.

The Transitions Support Programme for Key stage 2/3 is being co-produced with schools and is in development, for piloting in the Autumn Term, leading to a best practice protocol/programme to support transition. The work will focus specifically with Year 6 (September 2024) cohort transitioning into secondary in September 2025.

Support Service evaluations are underway as is an audit of training needs requested by schools. Heads' Funding Group has requested a longitudinal study of the impact of support services on children's outcomes. This collective information will confirm how support services in West Berkshire evolve and any additional funding for innovation or development will be submitted to the DBV Task Group.

The Whole School Mental Health Project was initially intended for delivery from April 2024 but due to significant challenges with Educational Psychologists' retention, changes in the management structure of the Educational Psychology Service and pressures on recruitment, this has been delayed until September 2024. The Local Authority is endeavouring to secure staffing for this project so that it can commence in September 2024 but there remains a risk in achieving this in time for September and the project itself will extend beyond March 2025.

5.4 Workstream delivery confidence RAG rating: AMBER/GREEN

5.5 Evidence and Progress

Additional DBV funding has allowed the Early Development and Inclusion Team (EDIT) extra 3 days a week specifically for transition support, i.e. the organisation of transition meetings to ensure that they happen with the right level of detail for all children, input into or attending the meetings for all 63 children.

With this extra input, the one-page pupil profiles (pupil passports) are being promoted and are being used successfully and a much greater level of detail being shared about children with schools and actions are agreed and followed up. The initial findings are the impact on transition preparations is considerable, and following further evaluation, the intention would be to continue to support the children in school in the Autumn and Spring Terms.

The DBV funding has allowed for training for 43 FS1 and FS2 staff on Attachment and how that can affect children's smooth transition into school and how to provide an environment that supports the needs of the children who are coming in. Further training this term will include "Heavy Work" and "Planning for Positive Behaviour". Targeted support work and the parent liaison continues to pick up on children who are heading towards school who might 'fall through the net' and not make that good

transition which may result in requests for EHC assessments and subsequent specialist provision.

5.6 Measuring impact

The Early Years Transitions Programme support has some quantitative and qualitative data. However, for other areas it is too early in the programme to measure impact.

5.7 Has there been any slippage in delivery plans?

Slippage in the start of the programme in April 2024 was due to the delay in appointment of some key roles: DBV Data Analyst and DBV Commissioning Lead. These staff are now in place and level of experience and expertise is ensuring that the programme is delivering on time.

Delay in instigating the Mental Health Project due to recruitment and restructuring issues will delay its commencement by 5/6 months, and therefore an extension beyond the end of March 2025 has been requested for the delivery of this element.

The limitations of the current capacity of the PCF are impacting on co-production activities but the Engagement and Communication Lead is working in partnership with the PCF committee to support and build capacity e.g. publishing PCF activities and staging combined event with families to promote PCF in the community.

The capacity of our health partners has delayed the delivery of the GAP analysis but we are supporting work in this area with regular meetings to ensure there is an agreed schedule of delivery that aligns with competing priorities in health.

The capacity of permanent local authority staff has caused pressure over competing priorities as the council is expecting a local Area Inspection imminently. However, work priorities have become aligned, as the integration of the DBV Programme has become incorporated into the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy, creating an overarching delivery plan.

6. Overall progress on total opportunities including, implementation plan and DSG management plan

The revised DSG plan (July 2024) indicates that there are two key updates since February:

- 1) 23-24 outturn figures confirmed
- 2) 24-25 budget confirmed

The DBV team reviewed the clawback request presented to the Schools Forum in December 2023 and recommended that this be re-considered by the Schools Forum meeting in June 2024. Balances over 10% have been agreed to be clawed back from schools, subject to a review on current commitments. The value of this is currently unknown but will be added to the deficit management template once confirmed.

However, the estimated mitigated deficit by the end of 27-28 has increased by £4.5m.

7.0 Conclusion

As the DBV Programme has only been delivered for 3 months only very limited progress has been made but the systems are now in place to realise the opportunities available. Importantly, schools and Local Area Partners are very aware of the pressures that remain and are committed to addressing these to create a sustainable financial model moving forward.

8.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Deficit Management Plan Slides