
Delivering Better Value : September 2024 Update

Report being considered by: Schools' Forum on 14th October 2024

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

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Delivering Better Value Programme (DBV) and its impact on the SEND system in West Berkshire to the Heads Funding Group.
- 1.2 The report is updated regularly so that Heads Funding Group is informed of progress in the delivery of the programme, its impact in improving outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs/Disabilities, and the programme's contribution to successfully reducing the High Needs Block deficit by transforming the delivery of SEND support in West Berkshire.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that Heads' Funding Group and Schools' Forum notes the progress made.

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 type="checkbox"/>	No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

3. Introduction/Background

- 3.1 The Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme is beginning to have an impact on the outcomes for children and young people with SEND (in the longer term this will impact the overarching Deficit Management Plan to reduce spend of the High Needs Block) ensuring a sustainable service delivery for SEND provision in West Berkshire.
- 3.2 This is a transformation programme that will support systems reviews of SEND activities and ensure that SEND Commissioning is effective in meeting the current and future demands of the local population, and in doing so, improve long term outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The DBV programme provides the first year's focus of activities to address the six propriety areas of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-29, "Innovation in SEND".

- 3.3 This paper highlights progress being made towards this, and in addition, the current risks to delivery and the mitigations in place.
- 3.4 Next steps and challenges are identified in section 4.19 to 4.23. If there is a delay in implementation of the DBV Programme, then there will be an impact on the High Need Block Deficit Management Plan.

4. Supporting Information

Introduction

- 4.1 This report outlines the progress of the DBV Programme since confirmation of funding from the Department for Education (DfE) in April 2024

Background/ Progress to date

- 4.2 Since April the DBV Programme and its governance has become fully aligned and incorporated into the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024- 29 to ensure the overarching delivery of the “Innovation in SEND” programme in West Berkshire.
- 4.3 West Berkshire is required to provide formal quarterly progress update to the DfE. The quarterly reporting cycle to the DfE is as follows: -
- April to June by 5th July – submitted and approved by the DfE.
 - July to Sept by 4th October
 - October to December by 10th January
 - January to March by 4th April
- 4.4 The four working groups of the DBV Programme meet monthly during term time and tasks have been instigated according to the DBV Programme Plan and incorporated into the SEND and Inclusion Strategy Delivery Plan 2024-2029.
- 4.5 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 Member for Children’s Services and Education, Chief Nursing Officer for the ICB and the ICB Place Director (Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire -BOB).
- 4.6 To further support communication with parents and carers, West Berkshire has invested in the Coram Parent Champion Programme. The Parent Champion programme extends 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 workstreams.
- 4.7 A SEND Strategic Communications Plan has now been adopted. It encompasses both work under the DBV Programme and the wider SEND and Inclusion Strategy under the collective strapline: “Innovation in SEND”. The draft Communications Plan

includes an 'Innovation in SEND' blog / web page where we host all updates on DBV.

- 4.8 DBV working groups meet monthly in term time to scrutinise the delivery of the programme and regular reports are submitted to Schools Forum and Heads Funding Group.
- 4.9 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. The DfE has agreed DBV grant funding can be used beyond 31 March 2025 until July 2025 on delayed projects.
- 4.10 The "Whole School Mental Health Project" has been redesigned as it was reliant on Educational Psychologists (EPs) to deliver the programme. Due to retention challenges Educational Psychology time is limited and must be prioritised in other areas. A revised, evidenced based programme has been commissioned from an external provider. The delivery of the programme will be led by the Virtual School Team who will work closely with 10 schools to develop a pilot. The pilot, if successful, can be expanded and will complement the current provision available for schools. In addition, all mainstream schools will have access to an online learning platform to support Mental Health identification and good practice.
- 4.11 The Transitions Support Programme Summer Term 2024 supported Early Years transition into Foundation 2, for September 2024. This will be continued into the Autumn Term 2024 to ensure vulnerable children are successfully supported into their mainstream placement. It is expected that it will build the confidence of receiving schools in their ability to meet need. An Early Years Transitions Guidance into mainstream schools will be published in the Autumn.
- 4.12 The Key Stage 2/3 Transitions Programme has been co-produced with schools (Primary and Secondary SENCos and Year 7 teachers). A West Berkshire Schools' Guidance for a Successful Primary to Secondary Transition will be published in October 2024. This is a good practice guide for schools to adopt when supporting transitions for vulnerable children moving between primary and secondary mainstream.
- 4.13 Pupil level data has been reviewed to enable the identification of mainstream Year 6 pupils most likely to require additional support at transition. Targeted interventions will be available for these children to ensure as many as possible successfully transition into their secondary mainstream school.
- 4.14 The first months of the DBV Programme have 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 needs locally and that are co-produced with local partners and families. Work on SEND Data Management has informed 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. This will be an area of focus over the coming months.

- 4.15 Phase 1 of a SEND funding review focussing on levels of funding available for children and young with SEND was completed at the end of August 2024. This was a desk top exercise to understand and benchmark current practices. Phase 2 will commence in September and will establish a working group of school leaders and Local Authority officers to co-develop a revised funding system. The working group will develop:
- A shared understanding of the range and levels of needs across West Berkshire settings and schools and how that compares with other areas.
 - A clear and consistent graduated approach to meeting needs across the local area.
 - A transparent and equitable system of SEND funding and resource allocation across West Berkshire.
 - Identification and development of changes to the current SEND system.
 - Improvement in the quality and clarity of EHCPs.
 - Evidencing the impact of resourcing on children and young people's outcomes.
- 4.16 A review of statutory decision-making processes has been undertaken to ensure transparency, consistency, and value for money. Any changes in process will be managed through consultation and updated on the local offer. A High-Cost Placement Review has been undertaken and is informing work around joint decision making in relation to Social Care, Education and Health Placements.
- 4.17 A cross-agency gap analysis has been completed in relation to the Universal and Targeted Offer in West Berkshire in conjunction with health colleagues – e.g. review of the support available around Autism, pre and post diagnosis. “A plan on a page” for available services will be published on the Local Offer. This is in response to issues raised by parents and practitioners regarding clarity of support available and referral pathways published on the Local Offer. Gaps in offers are being identified and will be commissioned or co-commissioned as necessary. The Local Offer will be updated to reflect these developments. However the changing of the Local Offer platform and the limited resourcing of Local Offer administration may delay this.
- 4.18 An audit of schools’ training needs has been undertaken and an evaluation of current LA support services is being completed to ensure evidence-based impact can be demonstrated.

Next Steps

- 4.19 Through a review of SEND systems, it is evident that there is reduced capacity in the SEND Team to undertake timely Annual Reviews or prioritise Annual Reviews at

points of transfer. The absence of annual reviews does not meet statutory requirements and directly impacts on children's and young people's outcomes, placement requests, tribunal outcomes and demand for high-cost Independent non-maintained placements. A business case will be submitted for additional resources to support the business-as-usual processing of Annual Reviews.

- 4.20 The Local Offer needs updating and ongoing monitoring to ensure that it continues to meet service user requirements. Current resourcing is not adequate to address this in a timely fashion. It is hoped that DBV grant can be used to provide some additional resource in the interim, whilst as assessment is made of the longer-term requirement for additional resource.

Challenges

- 4.21 Co-production is at the centre of this programme; however, the Parent Carer Forum consists of very few parents and therefore continues to have very limited capacity to engage with the DBV programme. However, through the work with Coram Parent Champion Programme, a wider group of parents and carers is being engaged.
- 4.22 Relationships with some schools have been more challenging whilst the "claw back" process for excess balances is being reviewed. Restoring and reinforcing these relationships will be a priority for officers in Autumn 2024 to ensure schools feel supported whilst undergoing Part 2 of the Banding Review. This will be co-produced with school heads and senior management, which will support understanding and engagement as we move forward with the process.
- 4.23 Significant staff changes in the SEND Team have added additional capacity pressures in the service. A restructure is scheduled and there are arrangements in place to ensure limited disruption in line management etc. whilst the review is being undertaken.

5. Options for Consideration

- 5.1 No other options are currently being considered at this time.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The DBV Programme is proceeding at pace and is broadly in line with the delivery schedule, but the anticipated risks will impact on delivery time and the Programme may run beyond March 2025 in certain areas, with DfE agreement.

7. Appendices

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