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# Delivering Better Value Programme- February 2025 update

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**Report being considered by:** Schools' Forum  
**Date of Meeting:** 10<sup>th</sup> March 2025  
**Report Author:** Hester Collicut  
**Item for:** Information      **By:** All Forum Members

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## 1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report provides an overview of the progress of the DBV Programme in West Berkshire in accordance with the report submitted to the Department for Education, reporting on progress made in the third quarter of the grant year, September-December 2024.

## 2. Introduction/Background

2.1 West Berkshire was successful in its DBV grant bid and received £1million funding, commencing in April 2024, to implement a one year SEND improvement programme. The programme's original completion date was 31 March 2025; however, two projects that were delayed, will continue to be funded by the DBV grant until June/July 2025, subject to confirmation by the Department for Education.

2.2 The West Berkshire DBV Programme consists of two workstreams:

- **DBV Workstream 1 Objective** - Clear communications with families and wider local area partners to support access to services and the SEND system when they need it.
- **DBV Workstream 2 Objective** - Enabling settings, schools, and colleges to meet the diverse needs of their communities locally including complex emotional and mental health needs of CYP.

2.3 The DBV Programme sits within the SEND and Inclusion Strategy, 2024 to 2029, and is incorporated within its six priorities and enablers. Any actions within the DBV workstreams that are incomplete by 31 March 2025, will be subsumed into the overarching strategic areas and will continue to be monitored by the SEND Strategic Improvement Board.

### 3. Supporting Information

#### 3.1

	Identified key areas of focus – Nov 2024	Activities and Outcomes
1.	Supporting work to develop SEND capacity in resourced and specialist-maintained provision in response to the sufficiency analysis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The “SEND Placement Sufficiency Analysis 30 August 2024” has supported work on developing SEND capacity. By using this in combination with SCAP forecasts, short and medium terms capacity development activities are being prioritised to meet projected demand.</li> <li>• To ensure that there is sufficient capital funding to support proposed and future developments of additional resourced provision over the next 10 years, a single “SEND Strategy – Infrastructure Delivery revised Infrastructure Development” business case was submitted for approval by the Council and is going through the approval and governance process currently.</li> <li>• Specialist capacity development is a priority over the next three years. It is anticipated that an additional twelve place Mainstream Secondary Resourced Provision will be available for 2025/2026. Additional provision is also being scoped for secondary Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) students to meet identified need. Medium term, increased specialist placements in local special schools are being pursued for 2026-2027 whilst additional primary and secondary resourced provision proposals are being developed with mainstream schools.</li> </ul>
2.	Review and target resources at SEN Support and enhance the mainstream offer by developing practice guidance at points of transition, working with cohorts of pupils, and piloting the Mental Health Project in Schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Transition support documents for Early Years to Primary and Primary to Secondary have now been published and have been launched with schools. Parent friendly versions are to be published in January 2025.</li> <li>• Thirty-two Year 6 children have been identified to be additionally supported in January 2025. These children have been identified by our LA advisory services. They may or may not have an EHC plan but are at risk of having an unsuccessful transition into their next mainstream provision or may even be a risk of exclusion through unmet needs. They will access targeted direct/indirect support from additional support workers jointly funded by the DBV Grant and the High Needs Block.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Early Years Transition Support Programme continues until March 2025 (DBV funded). The support programme extended the graduated offer by providing targeted visits for children not already known to the service and enhanced support for identified children as they transition into their mainstream school in September 2024.</li> <li>• Stage 1 of the new Attachment Aware and Trauma-Informed Mental Health Project (AATIMHP) has commenced. The aim of the programme is to develop relational, attachment-aware, and trauma-informed practice in schools, this is turn will: -             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Improve pupil inclusion, belonging and mental wellbeing.</li> <li>○ Upskill staff in supporting young people.</li> <li>○ Reduce need for high-level intervention such as suspension and exclusion.</li> <li>○ Increase attendance and engagement.</li> <li>○ Provide a framework to support schools.</li> <li>○ Provide initial evidence to support an updated WBC approach to inclusion – both at school and LA level.</li> <li>○ DBV grant is funding phase 1 only.</li> </ul> <p>There are a mixture ten secondary and primary schools taking part in stage 1.</p> </li> <li>• All schools have been audited in relation to Mental Health support in West Berkshire as whole and forty-eight schools responded. It will be used to ensure that schools’ needs are met as well as shaping our future support.</li> </ul>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Complete the co-produced SEND Funding Review to deliver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A shared understanding of the range and levels of needs across West Berkshire settings and schools and how that compares with other areas.</li> <li>➤ A clear and consistent graduated approach to meeting needs across the local area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SEND Funding Review will develop a fair, transparent and effective funding system for SEND. Part 1, a desk top review was completed in August and shared with schools on 7 October. The Mainstream working group is established, meeting monthly, and comprises of representatives from all phases of schools and LA officers.</li> <li>• The mainstream group has reviewed other LA Banded Funding models and frameworks and identified elements the group would like to see incorporated into a West Berkshire model which is being developed through co-production activities.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A transparent and equitable system of SEND funding and resource allocation across West Berkshire.</li> <li>➤ Identification and development of changes to the current SEND system.</li> <li>➤ Improvement in the quality and clarity of EHCPs.</li> <li>➤ Evidencing the impact of resourcing on children and young people's outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Special School Group has developed a draft set of revised descriptors of need in relation to funding, having been developed based on other LA examples.</li> <li>• The working groups are developing guidance for schools on SEND Notional Funding in the Spring Term, along with early intervention models. There will be broader engagement work with SENDCos in February and March to help inform the actions needed.</li> <li>• This work will inform the revision of the Ordinarily Available guidance which will be completed by June 2025 and link into work undertaken in the Supporting Inclusive Practice Task Group.</li> </ul>
4.	<p>Developing commissioning and brokerage facilities and exploring opportunities with co-commissioning gaps in service with health partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arising out of the High-Cost Placement Review, a Commissioning and Brokerage Project has been accelerated using DBV funding to be delivered by March 2025. It will allow for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Creation of a specialist commissioning and brokerage function for all children's placements.</li> <li>○ Implementation of robust quality assurance and contract management</li> <li>○ Commissioning function that ensures that the right services are commissioned at the right time.</li> <li>○ Increased assurance that the council is operating efficiently and delivering value for money through its commissioning</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
5.	<p>Ensure data and administrative systems are robust and effective in meeting increased demand by exploring opportunities presented by new technology and updated system processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Data Dashboard with glossary and briefing paper regularly informs the SEND Strategic Improvement Board.</li> <li>• A wider Inclusion Dashboard is also being developed to be published on the Local Offer.</li> <li>• A new quality assurance tool for EHC plans – Invision 360, is being implemented in 2025 following recommendations from the SEND Funding Review.</li> <li>• It had been anticipated that the EHC portal capita programme co-production work would be underway but current capacity in existing teams is delaying its implementation and its completion within initial time frames and is an area of risk.</li> </ul>

<p>6.</p>	<p>Supporting the updating of The Local Offer to ensure it meets service user requirements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The migration of the Local Offer to a new platform has encountered some technical difficulties but the promotion of Local Offer to internal partners such as Library Services and Social Prescribers is underway.</li> <li>• A revised homepage and improved keyword searchability went live in December. DBV funding supported short term increased capacity to progress SEND local offer developments in light of the migration.</li> <li>• Through the summer and Autumn Term work has continued on “plans on a page” demonstrating a balanced model offer of services. Parent/carer friendly plans on a page are to be published in January 2025 on the Local Offer to confirm access routes to services available.</li> <li>• A joint initial workshop was held with health colleagues on 30th October following a gap analysis of local plans on a page produced by Education, Health, and Social Care services. The ICB held an online event on 22nd October to update on changes to referral processes for ASD and ADHD services using the “needs led” approach. Implications of these changes will be fed into the gap analysis work. A further meeting is scheduled in February 2025 to jointly address issues raised.</li> <li>• The new Health ASD Pathway will now be launched in early 2025 and the ICB and WBC are working together to coproduce a more integrated ASD Pathway.</li> </ul>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Continuing to develop parental /carer engagement through the Parent Carer Forum Coram Champion Programme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications with families and engagement with parents/carers has improved following the instigation of our Communications Plan and involvement with the Coram Programme.</li> <li>• SEND Blog: Innovation in SEND - West Berkshire Council – continues to provide regular updates on SEND developments -. “You said we did” Local Offer. It now has eight posts with updates regularly scheduled to showcase developments and milestones e.g. 4th November Blog – Response to West Berkshire SEND Local Offer Survey .The govDelivery newsletter is linked to the Innovation in SEND blog - pushing out the blog post to subscribed residents who are alerted via email whenever a new blog is published. Newsletter analytics are helping us to track reach and engagement. In addition, the Council social media channels are</li> </ul>

		<p>utilised regularly to promote Innovation in SEND blog/activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recruitment and training of our first cohort of parent/carer volunteers to the Coram programme is underway. Coram Parent Champion Training has taken place at Central Family Hub on 14th, 21st November, and 5th December.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Our last newsletter was read by ninety-two residents, increasing month on month.</li><li>○ Current Subscribers to Blog Bulletin – 114 (Dec 2024)</li><li>○ The Coram Programme has now launched two cohorts of parents trained and skilled in the Programme delivery.</li></ul></li><li>• Parent/Carer Forum (PCF) are increasingly involved in co-production activities in relation to DBV Programme, represented at the SEND Strategic Improvement Board and co-producing specific projects e.g. Parent friendly plans on a page guide for services under development.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Parent Carer Forum Membership has increased from 4 in April 2024 to 42 in November 2024 and regular meetings are underway.</li></ul></li></ul>
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#### 4. Options for Consideration

- 4.1 The DBV Programme should be completed by 31 March 2025, however as stated previously, some activities will extend into the Summer Term 2025. All DBV Grant Funding will cease by July 2025.
- 4.2 Engagement of Primary, Secondary mainstream schools, Academies and Special Schools in the SEND Funding Review and pilot Mental Health Programme shows a commitment to the urgent need to drive reform in this area with co-production at the heart of the programmes.
- 4.3 The membership of the PCF is increasing but active engagement to promote co-production is limited due to the capacity of lead members of the PCF. The Coram programme is increasing capacity for engagement with the wider community and the PCF is continuing to be supported closely by the Local Authority.
- 4.4 The Innovation in SEND Delivery plan records in detail progress towards key milestones in the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2029 which encompasses the DBV Programme.
- 4.5 The systemic changes required to drive improvement in SEND delivery are often co-dependent and progress in one area is reliant and developments in another. Schools

are very engaged with the SEND Funding Review however the development and consultation process is taking longer than initially anticipated. Therefore, it is now anticipated that the new mainstream model shall start to be implemented in September 2025. The Special School implementation may be delayed until April 2026.

- 4.6 The revision and updating of the Ordinarily Available Guidance are interconnected and co-dependent on the SEND funding review and therefore its production is in part, dependant on progress in this area. In addition, revisions in decision making processes are also codependent with the SEND funding review and delay in completing actions are due to the symbiotic relationship between the two processes.
- 4.7 The Targeted Transition Support Programme commences in January 2025 for thirty-two identified Year 6 pupils. These children will be supported into secondary mainstream. The children are from a substantial number of different schools, so the team's work is over a wide geographical area. The pilot enhanced transitions support programme of 6/7 will now run until December 2025, co-funded with schools, and therefore evaluation of this Programme will be delayed.
- 4.8 The AATIMHP (Mental Health Project in Schools) Phase 1, will now be completed in June/July due to initial recruiting difficulties.
- 4.9 The increasing number of maintained EHC plans continue to exert pressure on the system. On 9th December 2024, there were 1663 active EHC plans registered with a continued increase in demand for statutory assessments anticipated by the end of December 2024 and beyond. Further detailed work on the breakdown of EHC numbers and projections has informed short to medium term SEND place planning for 2025.
- 4.10 A review of previous data on original EHC numbers /types of need and placement type has required a revision of the Deficit Management Plan (DMP) submitted with the second quarter return. Inaccurate EHCP figures impacted on Newton's original forecasts but following data cleansing activities over the last six months, a confirmed position has been arrived at. The most notable change from the previous version is that the EHCPs are now allocated to the right provision and therefore the unit cost is more accurate.
- 4.11 The DSG Position (pre recoupment total in 2024-2025 is £15,766,217 deficit following mitigation. (Unmitigated £20,863,699). This includes a brought forward deficit of £945,756 including the Schools Block Transfer for 2024-2025.

## 5. Proposals

- 5.1 Key recommendations from the initial work undertaken by the SEND Funding review have accelerated focus on improving quality of EHC plans.
- 5.2 Due to service re-design and staffing capacity in the ICB, the combined data dashboard and development of gap analysis etc of service offers has delayed delivery. However, better working relationships arising from strong leadership at the SEND Strategic Improvement Board has meant that delays are highlighted, and issues raised when they occur.

- 5.3 The SEND Dashboard continues to be updated, and the priority remains to incorporate health information into a single dashboard. This will inform the SEND Strategic Improvement Board. Currently the Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) shares quarterly data updates with Local Authority. However, the quality of this information has been poor and submission inconsistent. This is being addressed and monitored through the SEND Strategic Improvement Board.
- 5.4 Work on an Inclusion dashboard will be prioritised in January /February 2025 for eventual publication on the Local Offer.
- 5.5 Work to establish a Commissioning and Brokerage function across Children's Services will be completed in March 2025. This will support improved quality assurance processes of providers, and the expansion of the alternative provision offer. Access to investment through transformation funding is essential to secure this activity.
- 5.6 **Governance** - From April 2025 the DBV Workstreams will be further incorporated into the Six Strategic Priority Area Task Groups. The DBV Task Group will cease, and new SEND Accountability Board will be established and report into the SEND Strategic Improvement Board.

## 6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The purpose of the national DBV Programme is to support local authorities and their local area partners to improve the delivery of SEND services for children and young people whilst working towards financial sustainability. In West Berkshire, the £1 million grant of the DBV Programme has instigated and accelerated significant improvement in SEND services by building capacity in the system to implement a change management programme embedded in the SEND and Inclusion Strategy, 2024-2029.
- 6.2 The pressures that are felt nationally, continue to exert demands on the system locally e.g. the increasing number of maintained EHC plans. Capacity of existing SEND teams to meet increasing demand remains a risk for the delivery of statutory services, including meeting 20-week deadlines for completion of EHC assessments and undertaking statutory requirements in relation to Annual reviews.
- 6.3 The High Needs Block mitigated forecast for 2024/2025 is £15.7 million<sup>1</sup>.
- 6.4 The anticipated mitigations through the DBV Programme, and additional mitigations identified will have an impact on the unmitigated Deficit Management Plan (DMP) forecast of the High Need Block. The savings identified below reflect the demand trajectory for EHC plans over the next few years. and the mitigations against these impacting on the High Needs Block. These have been adjusted since the November DMP. Inaccurate EHCP figures impacted on Newton's original forecasts but following data cleansing activities over the last six months, a confirmed position has been arrived at. The most notable change from the previous version is that the EHCPs are now allocated to the right provision and therefore the unit cost is more accurate.

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<sup>1</sup> Deficit Management Plan – December 2024 update



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- 6.5 There has been a methodical approach to the mitigated and unmitigated values, however the savings figures have yet to be validated which will occur before quarter four submission in April 2025.

Deficit Management Plan	2025/26	2026/2027	2027/2028
Unvalidated DBV savings + additional mitigations savings per year	£9.1 million	£15.33 million	£21.73 million

- 6.6 The element of reduction in spend anticipated through the DBV Programme and additional mitigations 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.