

Delivering Better Value (DBV) Close Down Report

Report being considered by: Schools' Forum
Date of Meeting: 14th July 2025
Report Author: Hannah Geddert; SEND Strategy Officer
Item for: Information **By:** All Forum Members

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the progress achieved through the Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme. This report also outlines the anticipated cumulative cost avoidance on the high needs block, next steps and priorities for sustaining improvements beyond the programme's formal end.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Note the progress made through the DBV programme, including anticipated cumulative cost avoidance on the high needs block.
- 2.2 Endorse the proposed next steps.

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. Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	<p>The financial impact of the DBV programme was never expected to be immediate, however, we are already beginning to see some encouraging signs of positive financial outcomes.</p> <p>The DBV programme has already generated an additional in-year saving of £534,716 through the enhancement of the Early Years Transition programme. This programme's funding is replicated for 2025/26, and similar levels of savings are anticipated year on year. This is in addition to DBV savings already predicted (cumulative additional total: £4,490,864</p> <p>Further additional mitigations have also been identified and have been included in the Deficit Management Plan (DMP) in</p>

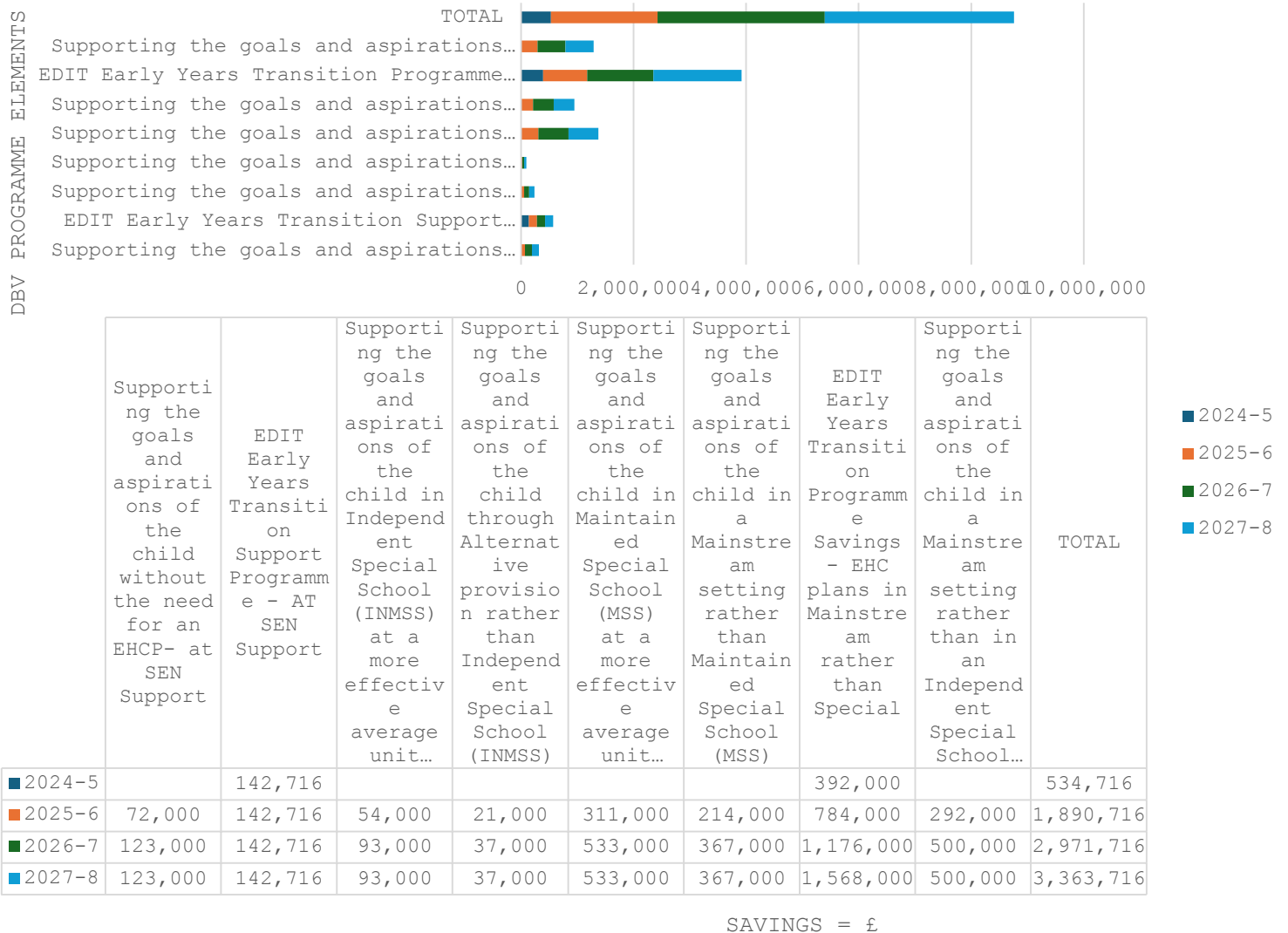
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	relation to specialist capacity development to reduce dependence on Independent Non-Maintained provision.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			While this paper is intended as an update rather than a decision, it is important to note that the DBV programme and SEND & Inclusion Strategy (Innovation in SEND Programme) are designed to reduce inequalities by improving access to support and services for children and young people with SEND and their families.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			By promoting earlier intervention, more inclusive practices, and a better understanding of local need, the programme aims to positively impact those with protected characteristics – particularly children and young people with disabilities – ensuring they receive the right support at the right time in a way that promotes equity, inclusion and improved life outcomes.
Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Although still in its early stages, the newly formed West Berkshire Parent/Carer forum has been actively involved in the Innovation in SEND Programme (DBV and SEND & Inclusion Strategy).</p> <p>The DBV programme has helped to refresh and strengthen engagement with parents, carers, and families, as well as with partner agencies – including health and schools. This has included the development of the Innovation in SEND blog, which shares key updates and progress of the work undertaken as part of the Innovation in SEND programme.</p>			

4. Introduction/Background

- 4.1 This report marks the closure of the DBV programme. The DBV programme has provided the impetus to drive transformation in SEND which now needs to be consolidated and developed over the lifetime of the SEND & Inclusion Strategy.
- 4.2 The mitigations anticipated by Newton Europe and the DBV Programme are due to commence in **September 2025**, with a cumulative impact over the next 5 years and informed the deficit management plan (DMP).

Delivering Better Value Programme - Mitigated Savings - 2024-2028



- 4.3 Although progress towards these mitigations has been good, the demand for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNA) continues to increase, as does the need for further specialist SEND provision.
- 4.4 Early identification and intervention will continue to drive down the need for EHCNAs to access appropriate support. Working in partnership with families and wider service providers, including the ICB, will improve access to targeted SEND support.

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- 4.5 Implementing the findings from the co-produced SEND funding review will support schools in accessing appropriate levels of funding in a timely fashion to support SEND pupils.
- 4.6 Developing capacity in mainstream and special schools, and alternative provision, is a priority to drive down the costs of specialist provision and the requirement to place in high-cost independent non-maintained schools. Additional, short, medium and longer-term specialist provision is in development commencing between September 2025-2028.
- 4.7 Instigated Transition Programmes have already demonstrated significant cost savings and incorporating these into longer term programmes around inclusion would be beneficial.
- 4.8 However, pressure remains, whilst Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) numbers continue to increase so early identification and intervention remains a priority to drive down costs.
- 4.9 Revisions in commissioning arrangements are necessary to drive down costs of high-cost placements; essential activities include:
- **Establishing an integrated multi-agency inclusion surgery with quorate representation from the ICB and commissioned services as well as education and social care:** to ensure joint discussion and decision-making for pupils with SEND (EHCP and SEN Support level)
 - **Work to clarify the commissioning of Paediatric Therapy jointly with the ICB across the various contractual arrangements**

5. Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 The DBV programme was a £1million grant funded programme operating between April 2024 and March 2025. West Berkshire was one of 52 Local Authorities identified to receive support from the DfE, through this programme, to drive improvements in services and efficiency, to reduce the pressures on the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, whilst continuing to meet the needs of the local community through a sustainable programme.
- 5.2 The DBV Programme was incorporated into the overarching SEND & Inclusion Strategy 2024-2029, to ensure that the momentum and direction of transformation was sustained over the following years, once the grant programme ceased.

Background

- 5.3 The four task groups of the DBV programme have now been incorporated into the six priority groups of the SEND & Inclusion Strategy.
- 5.4 The SEND & Inclusion Strategy Delivery Plan 2024-2025 has been reviewed and updated to inform the delivery plan for the year 2025-2026. There are several incomplete actions from the DBV programme which have been carried over into this delivery plan and incorporated into the workflow. These are:

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- **The SEND Funding Review:** expected completion date for mainstream July 2025 with implementation in September 2025. For specialist the expected implementation is September 2026.
- **Development of Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) guidance:** arising out of the funding review, expected completion is July 2025 and is contingent on the outcome of the funding review.
- **Development of review of decision making:** arising from the funding review with an expected completion of July 2025.
- **Year 6/7 Transition Support Programme:** extended until December 2025, part-funded by West Berkshire Council.
- **Mental Health Project in Schools:** extended to July 2025 due to delays in recruitment.
- **Development of a combined Local Area dashboard:** delayed due to national health data reporting initiatives.

5.5 The Governance Structure for SEND has been revised to ensure continued scrutiny of SEND Transformation. The multi-agency SEND Strategic Improvement Board will now be supported by an internal Local Authority SEND Operational Group.

Proposals

- 5.6 Addressing parental confidence in the system remains paramount. It is important that Local Authority systems remain agile and responsive. The use of data to support evidence-based practice and development is now more robust, modelled through DBV initiatives undertaken over the past year. However, there remain very significant risks in the system.
- 5.7 Data gathering has demonstrated that Annual Reviews are not undertaken in a timely way. A significant percentage of EHCPs are not updated within statutory timeframes to reflect progress and changing provision/funding requirements. This impacts on successfully placing children and young people at point of transfer and delays may impact on tribunal rights of parents and carers whilst amendments to EHCPs are agreed. The development of capacity for Annual Reviews is a key priority identified within the SEND & Inclusion Strategy Delivery Plan and must be recognised as a strategic priority given it is a statutory duty which is not currently being met.
- 5.8 Completed data cleansing activities have improved accuracy in relation to recording placement types, need and other information vital for sufficiency planning. It is important that this is monitored and maintained to ensure continued good practice in this area. Ongoing training and induction for staff will ensure the effective use of Capita ONE to deliver functions and will support productivity in this area.
- 5.9 The use of data to inform evidenced-based practice is imperative to drive performance. Data dashboards already shared at the strategic level could be used regularly to inform team meetings and appraisal targets so there is a collective ownership and understanding of team outcomes. It is imperative to ensure resource to the maintenance and development of the data dashboard continues to ensure

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accurate, up-to-date insights that inform strategic decision-making and enable effective monitoring of progress against SEND priorities.

- 5.10 Capacity in teams remains an issue as demand on services continues to increase. By streamlining services, through revised structures, and making use of additional technologies, resources can be targeted to support teams.
- 5.11 A revised quality assurance programme in relation to EHCPs is now underway. Annual Reviews will also be part of this programme as it develops. Multi-agency input into this process is vital, at all levels, to ensure that improvements and understanding is expanded across the workforce contributing to EHCNAs.
- 5.12 As an outcome of the SEND Funding Review, decision-making processes will need to be revised to support proposed new systems. These should be transparent, and evidence driven.

6. Other options considered

- 6.1 It is important to highlight the proposed next steps to ensure the momentum gained through the DBV programme is not lost. With the programme now concluded, there is a risk that focus on SEND transformation could diminish. Continued strategic commitment is essential to build on the strong foundations laid and to drive forward lasting, meaningful change and financial sustainability.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 This report outlines the progress achieved through the DBV programme and sets out clear next steps and priorities to sustain and build upon this progress now that the formal programme has concluded.
- 7.2 The DBV programme has acted as a catalyst for our SEND Transformation, helping to drive forward key areas of improvement with renewed energy and focus.
- 7.3 To maintain this momentum, it is essential that the work continues to be strategically supported and embedded into ongoing service development.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 None