

West Berkshire Local SEND Reform Plan

SEND Reforms

The reforms are about building a better local system for children and young people with SEND

- More children's needs identified earlier
- More support available without always needing a statutory plan
- More children supported closer to home
- Stronger mainstream inclusion, with specialist help available when needed
- Better outcomes for children and families
- A more financially sustainable system over time

DfE expectations

- ❑ Draft submission to DfE: 15 May
- ❑ Final submission to DfE: 19 June
- ❑ What the submission includes: Local SEND Reform Plan, Local Partnership Maturity Matrix template, Local SEND Reform Data Return
- ❑ Resubmission window: If not approved, local areas can revise and resubmit in September
- ❑ Service risk: West Berkshire is awaiting its next Area SEND inspection, currently expected in September
- ❑ Delivery challenge: The plan reflects a substantial reform programme and the significant work still required over the next three years, challenges with data in terms of projection – significant changes to how we capture, evaluate and use our data
- ❑ Quarterly returns to the DfE: required up until 2028-29
- ❑ By 2028-29, DfE expects the local authority to have a mature SEND system with control of HNB expenditure

Link to plan: [Local SEND Reform Plan - West Berkshire](#)

Summary of local SEND Reform Plan

What the plan articulates

- ❑ Highlights current pressures across the SEND system, including **rising EHCP demand (68% increase from Feb-March 26)**, increasing reliance on independent and non-maintained placements, workforce capacity challenges and financial strain
- ❑ Local area partnership has rated the system as emerging in most places and not yet emerging in others
- ❑ A realistic and evidence-based plan for change, focused on improving inclusion, earlier support and stronger partnership working
- ❑ A shift away from reactive, statutory-led support towards a more preventative system where needs are identified and met earlier
- ❑ A strong local focus on three key areas: earlier specialist support through Experts at Hand, better sufficiency and place planning, and stronger governance and co-production
- ❑ A phased and pragmatic approach, recognising that pressures will continue in the short term while the system builds capacity and confidence
- ❑ Clear success measures and oversight arrangements, so progress can be tracked and the plan adapted over time

Financial implications

Risks for LA

- ❑ 2026/27 funding: £1.7m SEND Capital (carry forward allowed) and £1.23m Experts at Hand & Transformation (must be spent within year)
- ❑ Potential £27m DSG High Needs Block deficit write-off, with opportunity to reinvest avoided interest costs locally (no benefit realised unless written off).
- ❑ Delivery requires sustained programme capacity (comms, co-production, implementation) alongside wider priorities (e.g. Best Start), with continued corporate support critical to maintain pace and manage risk
- ❑ High-risk financial position: continued overspend projected over next 2 financial years, with uncertainty around future national arrangements (e.g. statutory override).

System risks

Rising demand pressures: 68% increase in assessment requests (Feb–Mar), likely increasing short-term HNB costs.

- ❑ Current reform funding insufficient alone to meet growing demand, cost, and delivery pressures.
- ❑ Ongoing mainstream funding constraints (~£14k primary / £48k secondary) may limit inclusion capacity.

Next steps

2026–27 Local Delivery Plan: Roadmap Infographic

