

SEND Transformation Update

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Schools Forum on the SEND Transformation Programme.

Background

2. The SEND transformation programme brings together all the changes we're progressing in SEND in Wiltshire.
3. The programme will include:
 - a. The new SEND, Inclusion and AP Strategy (2024 – 2029).
 - b. The existing SEND and Inclusion Strategy until that ends later this year.
 - c. The High Needs Sustainability Plan and Safety Valve agreement which sets out how we will improve outcomes while reducing our deficit.
 - d. Any changes that need to be made following external inspection or review.
4. The most important aim of the programme is to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Wiltshire. We believe that through improved outcomes, especially by shifting resource 'up stream', we can meet our other primary driver: financial sustainability.
5. This report focuses on the High Needs Sustainability Plan and Safety Valve agreement.

The Safety Valve Agreement

6. Safety Valve is a DfE programme to support councils that have a financial challenge with their High Needs Block. The invitation to join Safety Valve was received in July 2023.
7. The High Needs Block Sustainability Plan for Wiltshire has been developed with stakeholders to identify improvements in our SEND system that will create better support for children and young people and their families, while addressing the financial challenges.
8. That plan was submitted to DfE in January with endorsement from Wiltshire Schools Forum, Children's Select Committee, and a cross-sector board including membership from Wiltshire Parent Carers Council (WPCC) and the Integrated Care Board (ICB).
9. Since the last Schools Forum, the Safety Valve agreement has been signed and the programme team have begun to implement the workstreams which will deliver the change required. The published agreement can be found on the DfE website: [Dedicated schools grant: very high deficit intervention - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dedicated-schools-grant-very-high-deficit-intervention)

10. As reported in January, at the end of the plan period, the cumulative mitigated deficit is forecast to be £137.2m. In March, it was reported that Wiltshire Council would likely have to contribute £70-90m. Now that the agreement has been signed it confirms that the expectation is that the DfE will contribute a total of £67m to the reduction of the deficit and therefore the Council will need to contribute £70.2m from general fund sources to completely remove the deficit.
11. The first DfE payment of £26.8m was received in March 2024 and has been utilised to reduce the cumulative deficit at the end of the 2023/24 financial year.
12. If the council successfully meets the deal criteria faster than expected, then the council contribution could reduce however, if the council fails to meet the deal criteria then this figure will go up, and could lead to the DfE suspending future Safety Valve funding.
13. The council approved the creation of an earmarked reserve as part of the budget and will be taking an approach of maximising all opportunities to set money aside to fund the contribution required.
14. Appendix 1 shows the summary table from the Council's DSG Management Plan which supports the Safety Valve Plan.

Programme Update – June 2024

15. Recruitment to the programme team has been successful. A project manager and programme support officer have already started and are delivering significant pieces of work. The final two project managers are starting at the end of July, so that they are fully inducted and ready to fully support the programme in the new academic year.
16. Overall, the programme is RAG rated Green, and the financial projections are RAG rated Green.
17. This status is a reflection of the work that has begun to address all the pressure points in Wiltshire SEND system. Efforts have primarily been focussed on developing the support offer for Schools in the new academic year and reviewing internal decision-making processes. These areas are most likely to deliver meaningful impact in the short to medium term.
18. The DSG outturn for 2023/24 indicates that the Council is within the terms of the agreement for that year. The financial position for 2024/25 is rated as green as whilst there are pressures in the budget we are at an early stage in the project and therefore able to implement any mitigating actions that may be required at this stage.
19. As noted in paragraph 3, the Safety Valve agreement, the new SEND and AP Strategy, and the Sustainability Plan are being brought together into a single SEND Transformation plan. This is broken down into 6 priority programme areas:
 - Voice of the child and their family
 - Improving support, skills and practice
 - Right support at the right time
 - Preparation for adulthood

- Financial assurance in our SEND system
- Improving communication, processes and culture

20. Two programme areas within SEND Transformation are RAG rated amber:

- Right support at the right time – amber due to concerns about the delivery of new special school places and delays in announcements of capital funding.
- Preparation for adulthood – amber due to delivery plans still being in draft.

21. One area for further investigation is around the EHCP numbers. The number of EHCPs in the system currently is growing faster than was anticipated. Work has been undertaken to rule out a number of potential causes for this growth, including a statistical error. It does appear that the growth is real, and a reflection of stronger demand than expected in the forecast.

22. At this time, this is not a cause for concern as the interventions in the sustainability plan are not yet having an impact. This was anticipated in the modelling, however, steps are being taken to ensure that senior officers are sighted on the monitoring data on a weekly basis, and further analysis is being undertaken to ensure that there is a full understanding of where system pressure is coming from.

23. The council is still waiting to hear about the capital request of £5.7m that was submitted to bring forward the provision of special school places in the south of the county. The DfE requested more information about the bid in May, which was supplied. However, given this is a ministerial decision, the current expectation is that the authority is unlikely to hear back until after the UK General Election on 4th July, and probably not until September 2024 at the earliest.

What Changes will Schools See on the Ground?

24. The early priorities in the plan have been to focus on developing the support offer for Schools in the new academic year and reviewing internal decision-making processes. Schools will start to see changes in the following areas:

Domain	Impact
Policy & Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Authority will be firmer on application of the national SEND Code of Practice to ensure that this statutory code is being delivered as expected. This will include increased scrutiny of the support offered and the PDR cycles delivered before statutory support is requested. Increased focus on delivery of Ordinarily Available Provision for all Learners (OAPL) and support to ensure it is being delivered in every school.
Finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significantly increased investment in early help and inclusion services to enable the development of more rounded support to schools. More teams working directly with schools, and a more proactive approach to that support. Continued delivery of more specialist places across special schools and resource bases. Emphasis on 'right support, first time' leading to fewer inappropriate placements in settings while awaiting special school placement. Less reliance on independent special schools. Banding values reviewed and processes streamlined to try and ensure schools have what they need to support children with SEND and improve predictability in funding.
Intervention and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LA will expect a "warm welcome" for all children with SEN and their families and will proactively challenge schools where this does not appear to be happening, especially around transition points. More children with SEN will be supported in mainstream schools, and the LA will work with schools to ensure that high-quality inclusive practice is being delivered. LA will increase facilitation and commissioning of outreach from Special Schools to support better inclusive practice SEND early help advice and guidance line being set up for schools to seek support, strategies and social care input where appropriate in the early stages of need.
Training and Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEND and Inclusion training for schools made free to help us all build our collective system of excellence. This was strongly requested by schools and reflects the increased value being placed on upskilling across our whole system. Peer support and continuing professional development opportunities facilitated and encouraged by the LA. Including revitalised networks for SENCOs to support each other and share best practice.
Assessment and Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements to the way schools monitor progress through the assessment process so that they are kept abreast of developments through a "Customer Relationship Manager" type portal. LA will clear the assessment backlog and, by lowering referral numbers, will free up time for Educational Psychologists to do more preventative or early support work in schools. Increased emphasis from the LA in supporting schools to identify need early and put preventative or early support strategies in place to reduce the need for statutory support.
Collaboration and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LA will continue to facilitate and expect closer working relationships between schools and with other partners so the SEND 'system' is

Partnership Working	<p>strengthened. Renewed efforts to create the right culture in our system, where there is a sense of shared endeavour and shared values.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invigorated System of Excellence approach will offer opportunities for peer support and accountability, but also direct influence over the transformation programme. • Co-designed “Inclusion Charter” setting out what the LA, parent carers and schools should expect from each other as an agreed plan which we are all accountable for delivering. • The LA will back schools where they want to try something ‘different’ or ‘innovative’ to support children and young people with SEND. • Greater emphasis on peer support, and on schools holding each other accountable for delivery of good quality mainstream inclusion.
Parent and Carer Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools will have greater clarity from parent carers on what is important to them and their children. • LA will need support from schools in having the right conversations with parent carers about the options for their child.

25. We are working to ensure that significant elements of transformation programme are in place before the start of the new school year.

26. This will include:

	Impact	Rationale
SEND Early Help, Advice and Guidance Line	Schools and SENCOs can access guidance more quickly, especially where early support, outside of statutory support, might provide better outcomes for the children and the school.	Early identification of SEN can mean there is an opportunity for prevention and early help. We want to enable easy access to these approaches and strategies.
Free SEND and inclusion training	Schools are more able to access the training they need for their staff, improving mainstream inclusion.	Schools told us that one of their biggest concerns about delivering more mainstream inclusion was lack of training and experience in their staff. We want to accelerate the improvements in this area.
Autism Accreditation Pathway	Schools can access training and accreditation that improves support for children with autism.	Autistic Spectrum Condition remains the biggest primary need for children with SEN and so we will support schools with strategies and approaches.
NHS programme of training in neurodiversity (PINS)	The programme will work directly with 20 schools in Wiltshire to develop the school's capacity to support neurodiverse pupils.	The NHS is offering this programme to local authorities, and we want to ensure schools are given the tools they need to support a range of neurodiversity.
Inclusion Advisors working in schools	Inclusion advisors will work directly in schools providing advice, especially around the delivery of OAPL, supporting the delivery of high-quality inclusive practice.	Schools tell us that they want more 'hands-on' advice on delivering inclusive practice in the classroom. These Inclusion Advisors will provide this expertise.
SEND good practice networks	SENCOs will be further supported to meet collaboratively to share best practice and for peer support, advice and review.	Peer support was flagged by schools as something that they would really welcome to support better practice. Expanded SENCO networks, meeting 3 times a year as an authority, and 3 times a year as a locality will provide this.
SEND Portal	An online portal that provides a better interface during the ECHNA process. This will allow schools to see where applications are without the need for multiple emails.	All our stakeholders, including schools, had comments about the complexity and opacity of the SEND process. This portal should offer a greater level of transparency, process display, reminders about annual reviews etc.

Proposal

27. It is proposed that Schools Forum note the update on the High Needs Sustainability Plan and the proposed changes to be implemented for the new school year.

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