

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 includes:
 - a. The new SEND, Inclusion and AP Strategy (2024 – 2029): Meeting Needs Together – Ambitious for All.
 - b. The High Needs Sustainability Plan and Safety Valve agreement which sets out how we will improve outcomes while reducing our deficit.
 - c. 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.

The SEND and AP Strategy 2024 to 2029

5. The new SEND and AP strategy "Meeting Needs Together – Ambitious for All" was approved by Cabinet on 17 September 2024. The Strategy has six key priorities which will be underpinned by a clear implementation plan and oversight via the Local Area SEND and AP Board:
 - **Priority 1:** Children and young people and their families will be at the centre of planning, their views and aspirations heard and acted upon, as true partners.
 - **Priority 2:** Getting the right support at the right time, identifying and acting on our children's needs at the earliest opportunity and through promotion of inclusive approaches and practice across the local area.
 - **Priority 3:** Provide opportunities for timely planning, reflective of the views of the child or young person and parent carers' current needs, that have clear outcomes.
 - **Priority 4:** Ensure good quality communication and information, for families to have a positive experience when navigating services, with information that is easy to access and use.
 - **Priority 5:** Professionals and officers across the SEND system will have the skills, knowledge and training to enable effective collaboration across services, joint assessments and sharing of good practice.

- **Priority 6:** Children and young people will be prepared for adulthood and experience timely transitions, leading to increased skills, greater independence, and a greater range of opportunities in life.

6. The strategy document is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

High Needs Sustainability Plan

7. Appendix 2 to this report details the Safety Valve monitoring report sent to the DfE at the end of August 2024. It is a requirement of the agreement with the DfE for the council to report against the key conditions of the agreement, and on progress to deliver capital projects associated with the agreement.

8. These conditions are:

1. The authority undertakes to reach a positive in-year balance on its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) account by the end of 2028-29 and in each subsequent year.
2. The authority undertakes to control and reduce the cumulative deficit, not exceeding £84.5m in financial year 2024/25.
- 3.1. Provide earlier support for children and young people with SEND, improving inclusion practices and managing pressure points and school transitions;
- 3.2. Prevent the need for escalation by providing the right support, first time, including a more holistic response alongside health and social care, with improved management and communication;
- 3.3. Increase the number of special school placements, resourced provision, and alternative provision to ensure that children and young people can access the support they need, with proper reintegration support for children who belong in mainstream provision;
- 3.4. Improve transition pathways to provide a range of opportunities for young people with SEND to prepare for adulthood, including training, further education, and employment;
- 3.5. Foster a culture of change across the Wiltshire SEND and AP system by engaging with partners and parent carers, improving trust and coproduction across the sector.

9. The August monitoring report, Appendix 2, is the second monitoring report that has been sent to the DfE. This report covers the activity and data from June to August. Each submission of a report, on time, releases the next Safety Valve payment.

10. The first payment of £26.8m was received by the council on 28 March 2024. A further payment of £2.233m was received in June 2024 following submission of the first monitoring report to the DfE.

11. Appendix 2 contains a detailed update, data and graphs, but in summary, while significant steps forward have been taken, and much of the planned 'activity' is on track, the time from implementation of a project to the realisation of the benefits is greater than had been anticipated.

12. Financially, this means that the council is not on track to meet agreement condition 2 and will exceed the forecast £84.5m cumulative deficit (excluding Safety Valve

payments) in this financial year. The consequences of this are set out in the financial implications section of this report.

13. The status of the other conditions is set out below:

- Condition 3.1: While the project activity to deliver this condition remains on track, the data is not showing the impact of those interventions yet. The growth in the number of EHCPs has exceeded our forecast figures, and while the growth in EHCNA requests has slowed it remains at a high level. Consequently, this condition is rated amber- off track.
- Condition 3.2: The activity that was planned to support this agreement condition is on track and, while the number of children placed in the Independent Sector remains historically high it has not increased, as a percentage, over the past school year. This condition is therefore rated as green – on track.
- Condition 3.3: Despite significant progress, this condition remains amber – off track, as was the case last month. This is primarily due to the uncertainty around the Safety Valve capital funding which has still not been confirmed. The decision, due in March, was initially delayed by a request for more information, and then further delayed by the General Election and subsequent change in ministerial team.
- Condition 3.4: This workstream is amber – off track, and it is expected to be back on track by November. There is a lot of work happening in post 16 and transitions, however this needs to be more focussed and structured. The authority has recently taken on a new project manager to focus on developing this programme and it is expected that significant progress will be made in the next reporting period.
- Condition 3.5: This deal condition is currently green – on track. The authority has continued to engage partners and parent carers to ensure that trust remains high.

14. The monitoring report submitted to the DfE at the end of August confirms that the Council is not on track to meet the condition to reduce the cumulative deficit, not exceeding £84.5m (excluding Safety Valve payments) in financial year 2024/25. The current forecast projects an overspend against the plan of £10.156m in 2024/25.

15. Initial modelling has taken place to consider the impact of the increased commitments in the system from activity in the current year, and the further mitigations that need to be implemented in order to reduce spend by the 2028/29 financial year. This initial work indicates that the residual deficit at the end of the plan will increase by £34.5m compared with the agreed Safety Valve plan. The plan will be re-worked in order to fully confirm the impact in time for the November submission to the DfE.

16. The profile of the revised forecast is summarised as follows:

	Outturn 2023/24	Forecast 2024/25	Forecast 2025/26	Forecast 2026/27	Forecast 2027/28	Forecast 2028/29
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Cumulative DSG deficit - brought forward (deficit at beginning of financial year)	35.214	28.706	61.184	77.319	99.198	99.926
In year DSG deficit (before Safety Valve and local contributions)	20.292	39.177	41.280	28.579	7.428	-0.194
Safety Valve programme contribution	-26.800	-6.700	-6.700	-6.700	-6.700	-13.400
Local general fund contribution	0.000	0.000	-18.445	0.000	0.000	-51.822
Cumulative DSG deficit - carry forward (deficit at end of financial year including SV payments and local contributions)	28.706	61.184	77.319	99.198	99.926	34.509

17. The decision to enter the Safety Valve Agreement crystallises the requirement of a contribution from the council's resources to eliminate the cumulative deficit set out in the plan less any contribution from the DfE. This figure, based on the plan set out, is £70.2m. However, it should also be made explicit that the DfE contribution is a fixed figure therefore if the deficit grows as forecast in the table above, that financial liability resides with the council.

18. The council will be taking an approach of maximising all opportunities to set money aside in a specific earmarked reserve to fund the contribution required. If sufficient funds are not set aside by the end of the plan period (April 2029) then the council will need to identify funding for the residual balance or exceptional financial support will be required from government.

19. In order to deliver the required place sufficiency across the period of the plan a bid to the additional HNPCA grant made available to councils on the Safety Valve programme was made for £5.7m in order to accelerate the delivery of additional special school capacity. At the time of submission of the monitoring report no decision had been made by Ministers on the council's application for capital funding however the council has since been notified that the application has been successful.

Proposal

20. It is proposed that Schools Forum note the update on the SEND Transformation programme.

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