

SEND Transformation Update

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Schools Forum on the draft revised SEND Sustainability plan which was submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) in December 2024.
2. To outline the changes proposed to the plan, including a change to the length of the plan and to the interventions that are contained within the plan.

Background

3. The council has a Safety Valve agreement in place with the DfE through which the council commits to bring high needs expenditure into in-year balance by the end of the agreement, and the DfE commits to provide additional DSG to reduce the residual deficit as long as the council remains on track to deliver the plan.
4. 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/consultations/dedicated-schools-grant-very-high-deficit-intervention)
5. The agreement sets out commitments from the DfE and from Wiltshire Council. The DfE has committed to give Wiltshire Council an additional £67m over the 5 years of the agreement. These contributions are paid in instalments, profiled as follows:

Year	The Department agrees to pay the authority an additional £m of DSG by the year end
2023/24	£26.8m
2024/25	£6.7m
2025/26	£6.7m
2026/27	£6.7m
2027/28	£6.7m
2028/29	£13.4m

6. In addition, the council has agreed to regular monitoring, 3 times a year, to check on progress. The DfE will expect the council to report against the key conditions of the agreement, and on progress to deliver capital projects associated with the agreement.
7. 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.
8. Delivery of the Safety Valve agreement is being managed through the SEND Sustainability plan. The SEND 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.
 9. The first DfE payment of £26.8m was received in March 2024, and payments of £6.7m have been received during the 2025/26 financial year in line with the agreement.
 10. The revisions to the plan detailed in this report will be considered by Cabinet on 21 January 2025.

Programme Update – January 2025

11. As at the end of December, there are 6,354 EHCPs in the Wiltshire SEND system, this is 660 ahead of the forecast suggested by the original Safety Valve Plan. As a result of this increased growth in EHCPs, there are 41 more Independent Non-Maintained Special School (INMSS) placements than this time last year. The average cost of a INMSS placement is £35.56k more than one in a maintained special school.
12. These factors are driving an overspend in the High Needs Block of £45.74m. This is £17.49m more than the £28.25m overspend included in the original plan (based on the Q2 monitoring report).
13. Appendix 1 goes into greater detail about the reasons for this, and the data insights that have been gathered since the original plan was submitted. In summary, firstly the predictions around how quickly impact would be felt were optimistic. Secondly, the original forecast was based on a 5-year average, which included years where demand was artificially suppressed by COVID-19 and the assumptions about what happens to that demand were also optimistic.
14. There has also been an impact because the council has made significant progress with clearing the EHCNA backlog, ensuring that where children and young people have a level of need which would warrant an EHCP, this is available to them. The

result of this is that the backlog is now at its lowest level since 2020, but this has brought more plans forward.

15. Given these factors, the plan has been re-baselined and a new forecast created that maps the existing interventions and impacts onto the revised trajectory. It became clear that, without risking the quality of support that is available to children and young people with SEND, getting to balance in five years would not be possible.
16. Given the commitment that the Council rightly shows to maintaining that quality, as highlighted in the recent Ofsted/CQC inspection, officers worked up plans that would reflect the values-based approach which underpins the original SEND Sustainability Plan.
17. To achieve this, an evidence led approach has been taken to understanding what could be achieved in the short term. Given that Wiltshire already has more EHCPs per head of population than many of its statistical neighbours, it is not unreasonable to have an ambition that is based on achieving similar data milestones to statistical neighbours for metrics like EHCNA requests, robust decision making, and ceased plans.
18. Eight short-term interventions have been developed to move Wiltshire towards that target system by April 2026. All eight interventions place the needs of children and young people at the centre and are grounded in an invest-to-save approach.
19. These interventions have been mapped onto the revised forecast and officers believe that the earliest time that the High Needs Block could be balanced is March 2031, two years later than originally planned. This would make the SEND sustainability programme a seven year process, rather than the five years originally set out in the Safety Valve Plan.
20. This would leave a £123.4m residual deficit for Wiltshire Council to manage, up from £70.3m in the original plan. This will be a challenge, especially if local government budgets continue to be pressured, as they have been in recent years.
21. Extending the length of the Safety Valve agreement, and adjusting the deficit limits in it, are not steps that the council can take unilaterally and there will need to be further discussion with the DfE. The council should not expect the DfE to increase the contribution they are making as part of the Safety Valve agreement.

Financial Implications

22. The updated sustainability plan is no longer predicting a positive in year balance by the end of 2028/29. The latest forecast is that a positive in year balance will be possible by the end of 2030/31. This would leave a £123.4m residual deficit for Wiltshire Council to manage, increased from £70.3m in the original plan.

Provision Type	Revised Forecast							
	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000	2029/30 £'000	2030/31 £'000
Plan Year		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mainstream Provision (incl. Resourced Provision Top Ups)	23,190	25,055	19,512	18,090	16,885	16,003	15,580	14,985
Resourced Provision (places only)	4,249	4,933	5,712	5,582	5,822	6,062	6,302	6,542
Special Schools	28,137	34,504	34,262	37,147	40,333	42,937	45,047	47,072
Independent and Non-maintained Special School Provision	20,263	28,373	26,525	25,111	17,547	5,328	3,480	3,893
Post 16 Provision	11,150	12,193	13,112	12,034	10,379	9,365	8,500	8,106
Alternative Provision	7,980	9,040	9,974	9,319	8,877	8,720	8,520	7,530
Therapies	667	669	873	873	873	873	873	873
Other High Needs Block places and top ups	1,047	1,103	1,087	1,054	1,003	932	840	748
High Needs Block staffing etc	0	6,303	7,693	6,723	6,736	6,749	6,763	6,776
Total Expenditure	96,683	122,172	118,751	115,933	108,455	96,969	95,906	96,527
High Needs Block	-70,798	-74,445	-80,301	-82,710	-85,192	-87,748	-90,380	-93,091
Block Transfer	-1,797	-2,000	-1,937	-3,867	-3,983	-4,102	-4,225	-4,352
In Year Surplus (-)/Deficit(+)	24,088	45,727	36,513	29,356	19,280	5,119	1,301	-917
Surplus/Deficit from other DSG Blocks	-2,766	-2,531						
Safety Valve Income	-26,800	-6,700	-6,700	-6,700	-6,700	-13,400		
Surplus/Deficit Brought Forward from Previous years	35,214	29,736	66,232	96,045	118,701	131,282	123,001	124,301
Total Deficit Balance	29,736	66,232	96,045	118,701	131,282	123,001	124,301	123,385

Proposal

23. It is proposed that Schools Forum note the update on the High Needs Sustainability Plan.

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