

TITLE	DSG Management Plan and Safety Valve Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Schools Forum on 12 July 2023
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	Helen Watson, Director for Children's Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

This reports forms part of regular reporting to Schools Forum, informing areas of statutory decision making and improving visibility and consultation on wider Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) financial matters.

RECOMMENDATION

Schools Forum is asked to:

- 1) note the report and current consultation with schools to inform investment in the transformation and improvement of the local SEND system.
- 2) endorse the proposal to review DSG/School Forum guidance to evaluate possibility of transferring a sliding scale % based on school size and intake.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The LA is currently consulting with schools to seek views on the proposed priorities for investment in SEND improvement in order to deliver the DSG Deficit Management Plan (DMP) and bring the local area back to a balanced DSG budget. This report summarises the financial make-up of the DMP, the priorities for SEND improvement as identified by schools and summarises the proposals to address these priorities currently under consultation with schools.

The level of investment proposed would require the transfer of up to 1% of the DSG Schools Block to the High Needs Block. At this stage we are not consulting on the transfer itself; WBC is seeking school's views as to the priorities and proposals that make up the recovery plan and this information will inform the detailed final proposals that WBC will present in the September consultation process.

The proposed investment would deliver significant improvements for all children with SEND across the area and an economically viable SEND system by investing resources back into schools' SEND work to meet growing demands, with the following benefits:

- New SEND Support Service & Enhanced Specialist Outreach Offer to improve timely access to specialist advice, training and support – currently being co-produced with schools.
- A significant proportion of this funding will be invested back into local schools to support peer to peer support and sharing of local expertise and best practice.
- Design and implementation of more robust processes for the commissioning of high-quality Alternative Provision.
- Robustly ensuring consistency of the 'ordinarily available' offer across every school – ensuring equity and consistency as to what every school provide at SEN Support level.
- Improved communications with the SEND Team.
- The Council's own investment is also supporting development of new specialist provision – two Special Free Schools, expansion of existing special schools,

development of post-16 specialist provision and SEN Resource Bases and SEND Units on mainstream school sites.

This stage 1 information-gathering process will culminate in a stage two consultation with all schools in September 2023 specifying details as to proposed investment in the above improvements, and will make the business case for the transfer of Schools Block funding into the High Needs Block. The results of this stage two consultation will then be presented to Schools Forum in October 2023 for a final decision regarding the requested transfer.

SCHOOLS FORUM

12 July 2023

01. Purpose of the Report

To update Schools Forum on the current consultation with schools to inform investment in the transformation and improvement of the local SEND system and to shape the request for transfer of Schools Block funding to the High Needs Block in October 2023.

02. Recommendation

Schools Forum is asked to:

- note the report and current consultation with schools (attached as Appendices 1 & 2) to inform investment in the transformation and improvement of the local SEND system.
- endorse the proposal to review DSG/School Forum guidance to evaluate possibility of transferring a sliding scale % based on school size and intake.

03. Background

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) has been awarded the Dedicated Schools Grant 'Safety Valve' agreement by the DfE and as part of that agreement have made a undertaking to reach a positive in-year balance on its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) account by the end of 2028-29. In order to deliver this WBC has agreed to implement a Deficit Management Plan that sets out a range of measures and interventions.

Safety Valve funding from the DfE is to 'pay off' the cumulative deficit balance to circa 10% of DSG spend by the end of the programme – for Wokingham, this equates to circa £20m. There is no 'new' money being provided by the DfE to deliver Safety Valve to invest in additional services as part of the management plan. Whilst it is recognised that the only way to deliver a balanced High Needs Block is through investing in service improvement *this money must be found within local resources.*

In order to deliver this management plan, the local authority has identified a range of measures and mitigations to achieve the required reductions in spending on the High Needs Block in order to deliver a balanced budget by 2028/29. The Council is currently consulting with schools to set out the position and to seek their views as to the key

priorities for investment and to agree the most effective ways to work together to address the challenges and to develop a sustainable and effective SEND system.

The premise underpinning the Deficit Management Plan and the consultation is that the Local Authority cannot single handedly address the challenge of meeting escalating demand for specialist services whilst meeting the needs of children in mainstream schools. This can only be achieved at a whole-system level through all schools and partners working collaboratively to achieve a rebalanced system that is more inclusive across the Borough, more responsive to schools' identified needs for support and is underpinned by a strong partnership between the LA and Wokingham schools. This consultation exercise is designed to establish the common ground on which we will build the new system.

04.i DSG DEFICIT MANAGEMENT PLAN – FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

The consultation papers set out three sources of additional investment to support the transformation programme:

- i. As described above the DfE are contributing up to circa £20m additional funding through the **Safety Valve** Programme.
- ii. In addition, the local authority has created a new **DSG Equalisation Fund** - funded by an additional 1% Council Tax Levy, which will raise around £28 million over the six years of the programme. This will provide upfront investment of circa £1m in 23/24 and a total of circa £6.5m across the duration of the programme. This funding will also clear the remaining cumulative deficit of C £20m.
- iii. **Transfer of DSG Schools Block to High Needs Block** – The Council will be making a request to Schools Forum for a contribution to the required investment in the Autumn of 2023, which is expected to amount to 1% of the schools block (subject to the outcome of the consultation process). The current consultation exercise will determine the detail as to how much will be requested and exactly how it will be spent; this will then form the subject of a stage 2 consultation process with all schools in September 2023.

04.ii PROPOSAL TO CONSIDER APPORTIONING SCHOOLS BLOCK TRANSFER CONTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO SCHOOL SIZE OR PHASE

During the initial engagement and dialogue with schools in developing the Deficit Management Plan, a number of schools have highlighted the significant financial challenges that (particularly) smaller schools are facing in delivering balanced budgets; for these schools even where they are in full support of the SEND Improvement proposals outlined above the prospect of relinquishing part of their schools block budget to be pooled and invested centrally is still daunting and may result in very difficult decisions as to what to prioritise within the schools own resources.

In recognition of this, a number of secondary schools have enquired as to whether it would be possible to apportion the contribution either according to a school's phase or its size – e.g. having secondary schools fund a greater proportion of the total School's Block contribution or transferring a sliding scale % contribution based on school size and intake.

Initial analysis suggests this would not be simple and may not even be possible, so before pursuing this possibility further it is important to establish whether this proposal would be supported by Schools Forum? It is important to stress that this proposal has not come from the Local Authority but from schools themselves.

04.ii SCHOOL PRIORITIES

The key priority areas that schools have identified and that the Deficit Management Plan will directly address are as follows:

- i. Easier access to advice and support – improved early identification of need
- ii. There have been consistent calls for improved access to specialist advice and guidance regarding the following categories of need:
 - a. Social Emotional and Mental Health difficulties – including high levels of anxiety in the pupil population / attachment disorders
 - b. Speech and language difficulties
 - c. Autism
 - d. Cognitive needs / learning difficulties
- iii. Facilitating development of consistent inclusion standards regarding expectations as to what every school provides in its 'ordinarily available' SEND support and provision and how the wider system can support schools to deliver this.
- iv. Easier access to specialist provision for pupils who struggle in mainstream classrooms (AND raising awareness of what's available and entry criteria for these)
- v. Easier access to local special school places
- vi. Easier access to quality assured and cost-effective Alternative Provision
- vii. Improving communications between schools and the SEND Team and timeliness of statutory processes
- viii. Addressing waiting times for access to health services including therapies and related assessments and CAMHS
- ix. Addressing lack of capacity in the Educational Psychology Service – schools have identified challenges in accessing EP time.

04.iii DSG DEFICIT MANAGEMENT PLAN - PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

In order to deliver the required improvements, the Safety Valve programme is made up of 15 individual projects, grouped into four workstreams as follows:

Workstream 1: Early Intervention & Demand Management

1.1 - Redesign and Improve Local Offer Website and Support Offer.

1.2a - Implement a new Special Educational Needs (SEN) support service SEN - Build on and develop SENDCO Network – build on and enhance peer-to-peer support and moderation to develop more consistent and equitable offer across the area.

1.2b - Develop a fit for purpose specialist outreach offer which enables schools to access quality specialist support and intervention across all priority needs – speech and language, social emotional and mental health, autism, and cognition and learning difficulties.

1.3 Implement Early Years strategy, ensuring need is identified at the earliest opportunity, with the appropriate levels of support put in place.

Workstream 2: SEND Sufficiency & New Provision - Meet identified sufficiency needs and reduce reliance on the Independent and Non-Maintained Special School (INMSS) sector.

2.1 Develop Resource bases and SEND Units.

2.2 Addington Special School expansion.

2.3+4 Develop new Special Free Schools – Oak Tree and two new free schools

2.5 Implement Alternative Provision and EOTAS Review to ensure consistency, quality and choice for schools and vulnerable pupils.

2.6 Implement Post-16 and Preparation for Adulthood Strategy as well as development of new, varied, and additional Post-16 opportunities.

Workstream 3: SEND Commissioning

3.1 - Joint commissioning - Review 'Ordinarily Available' health offer in partnership with Health commissioners to ensure needs are met at the earliest possible opportunity including Therapies and CAMHS support.

3.2 - Improve contract management and quality assurance of Independent & Non-Maintained Specialist Provision – recruit new SEND Commissioner / Contract Manager.

Workstream 4: SEND Systems & Operational Improvement

4.1 Design and implement new banding framework for high needs placement funding to ensure transparency, consistency, fairness and sustainability.

4.2 – Digital Improvement - Improve reliability of data, accessibility of strategic and operational management information, and increase efficiency.

4.3 - Review SEND Panel Processes & Decision Making to embed consistency and ensure every school is providing an equitable level of ordinarily available provision.

Schools are currently active members of a number of the workstreams listed above and the Council is asking for continued commitment to and support for the projects set out above, which will be critical to the success of the entire Deficit Management Plan.

6. In Conclusion...

At this stage WBC is asking Schools Forum to encourage all schools to respond to the current live consultation, which is running until the 28/7/2023, will gather feedback on the proposals within the DSG Deficit Management Plan.

This will inform the final proposals for 2024/25 that WBC will consult upon with every school in September 2023. We are asking Schools Forum to note that the outcome of the September consultation and the request for the transfer of the Schools Block to High Needs Block will be presented at the October 2023 meeting, when full details will be provided.

Whilst WBC recognises the financial challenges that many schools are currently facing, pooling resources to overcome the challenges associated with the demand for SEND support is by far the most effective measure available to the local system and we are urging schools to carefully consider this request when it follows in the Autumn. We are

also asking Schools Forum to endorse the proposal to review DSG/School Forum guidance to evaluate the possibility of apportioning the contribution using a sliding scale % based on school size and intake as we believe this would help to address some of the affordability concerns for smaller schools raised by Headteachers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – Right Spaces Right Places – Consultation Document



Right Spaces, Right Places.pdf

APPENDIX 2 – Right Spaces Right Places – Survey Document

Please note this survey must be completed online on the Council's Engage consultation hub. Schools have been sent details as to how to create an account, which will be used for all future consultations. WBC is unable to accept printed or emailed copies of this questionnaire.



Right Spaces Right Places Survey.pdf