



Wokingham Borough Council

June 2023

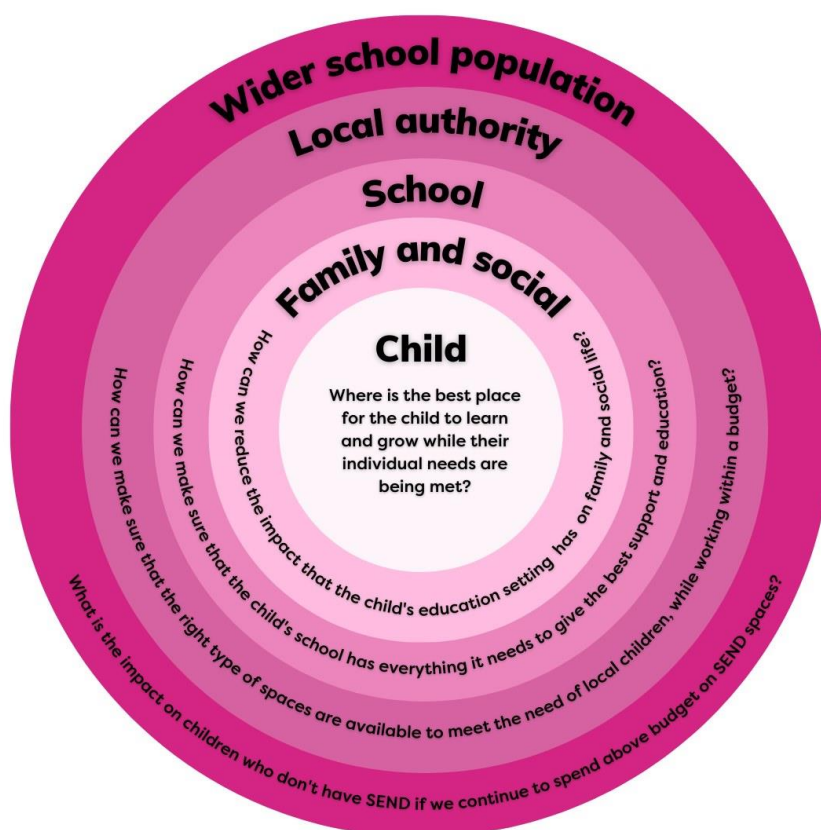
The Vision

Our vision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in the borough is simple.

We want all children and young people to have access to good quality education that meets their individual needs so that they are the best they can be while being **happy, healthy and safe**.

We know that providing the right support in the right setting at the right time provides the **best outcomes** for all children, while also being the **most cost-effective** way of meeting needs.

In short: Right Spaces, Right Places.



The story so far

Increasing numbers of children with EHCP's

The number of children with EHCP's is rising rapidly, and at a rate that is already unsustainable.

Between January 2018 and January 2022 there was an increase of **over 70%**, from 867 in 2018 to 1,488 in 2022.

If this trend continues, by 2028 we project around 2,800 children in the borough will have an EHCP, a **staggering 223% increase** over ten years.



Mounting financial pressures

The increasing number of children with EHCP's has meant we are reaching a crisis in the funding of services, with the deficit currently sitting at around £17 million.

Until now, we've been allowed to roll the deficit forward each financial year, but there is no guarantee we will be allowed to do this in future.

If something is not done soon, the consequences will be dire, significantly impacting every child and every school in the borough.



How did we get into this position?

- This is part of a wider **national challenge** in funding for SEND services, with most areas carrying deficits in their high needs block budgets; last year the accrued deficit in SEND budgets across English local authorities was **£2.4bn** and this continues to increase
- Sharp increases in **requests for statutory assessments**
- Current support to schools **under-utilised** with some local specialist outreach service **not being fully used** and some of our specialist **SEND provision not being full**
- **Gaps and constraints** in our SEND services for schools
- **Inconsistent inclusive practice** in schools following escalation pathways, with some schools **skipping early intervention** phases
- We are the **third lowest funded area** for education in the country
- Existing model of SEND services and support does **not meet current needs**, with some type of need not catered for particularly in light of the after-effects of the pandemic, which is continuing to impact on schools
- **Money has not been available** to transform the SEND services to address changing needs, and school budgets are under considerable pressure with some schools struggling to balance their budgets



So, what can we do about it?

Do nothing

If we were to do nothing and carry on as is, consequences for the local area will be **huge**.

This has the potential to bankrupt Wokingham Borough's SEND system.

Such a position would have negative consequences for every child and every school in the area.

So, we must do **something**.



Thankfully, we are already taking big steps towards making improvements, undertaking a transformation programme across all our local SEND services.

Our plan of action includes:

- Investing in a **new SEND support service** and local **specialist outreach services** to build confidence and skills in mainstream settings, so that schools can access specialist **support and advice** more quickly and more children can be supported in their local school
- **Two new special schools** (with funding already secured)
- Expansion of **Addington Special School** in Autumn 2023 and opening of **Oak Tree Special School** in September 2023
- Re-configuring our existing services in mainstream schools to make **resource bases more effective** and introduce a **new tier of support** through SEND units
- Introduction of a '**Preparation for Adulthood**' strategy and new **services for post-16**
- Put in place a **new early years strategy**, focused on earlier identification of need and earlier intervention



But we can't do this alone.

We believe **all** schools and partners need to work collaboratively to co-produce and deliver our SEND Improvement programme, leading to:

- 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
- A refreshed and shared set of expectations about the type of SEND provision that every Wokingham mainstream school and academy provides



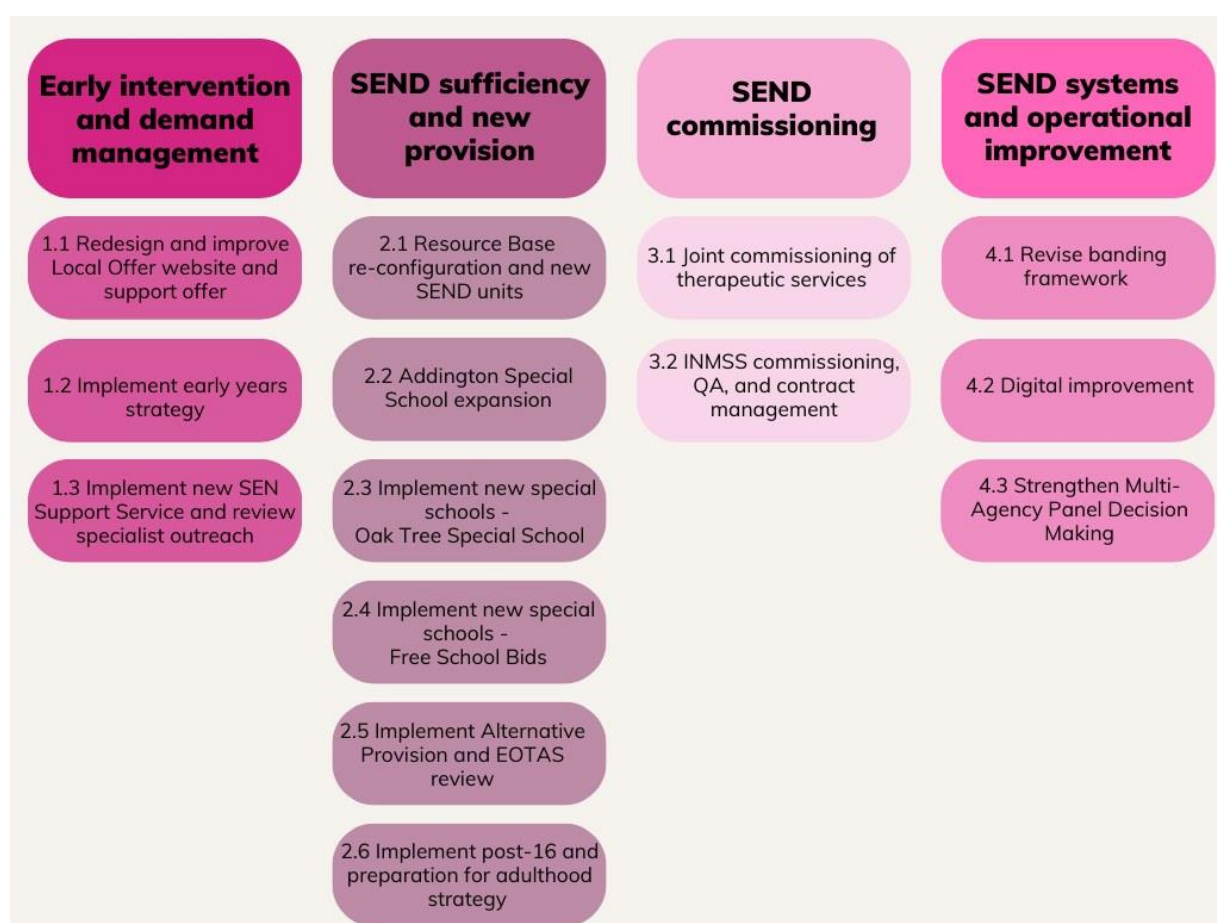
Key partners include:

- **Early years** providers, **schools** (including both mainstream and special) and **colleges**
- Local health services including our **speech and language and occupational therapeutic services**, recently recommissioned including a more child-centric service design and **significant increase in funding**.
- **Local organisations** supporting SEND children and their families.

We're in, what's the plan?

We're glad you asked.

We put together a plan based on **school priorities** and **local authority priorities**, which is made up of 15 projects grouped into four areas of work:



How will this be funded?

There are three parts to the funding for our SEND improvement proposals: Safety Valve grant, Council Tax Levy and the High Needs Block.

1. Safety Valve grant

In March 2023, we were awarded a grant from the Department for Education as part of the government's 'Safety Valve' programme, which over the next six years, will amount to around **£20 million**.

We are one of 34 local authorities who will receive this grant, and its two main objectives are:

1. Reach a positive **in-year balance** on the authority's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) account **by the end of 2028-29** and in each subsequent year.
2. Control and **reduce the cumulative deficit to £20.1m** (10% of the total DSG spend in the area) **by the end of 2028-29**

| Year | Forecast DSG deficit profile at year end £m |
|---------|---|
| 2022-23 | £16.6m |
| 2023-24 | £25.1m |
| 2024-25 | £32.1m |
| 2025-26 | £36.9m |
| 2026-27 | £40.1m |
| 2027-28 | £41.1m |
| 2028-29 | £20.1m |

There is **no 'new' money** being provided by the DfE to deliver 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 us, this equates to £20m.

This money is not for investment in services BUT will pay off half the expected deficit.

It is recognised that the only way to deliver a balanced High Needs Block is through investing in service improvement.

2. Council Tax Levy

In an **extremely rare** move for local authorities, we've agreed to a 1% council tax levy over the next six years.

This means that **1% of the council tax from every household** in the borough will go towards SEND improvement. Over the six years of the programme, this will raise around **£28 million**

We are calling this the DSG Equalisation Fund.

Around **£20 million** of this will contribute towards **paying off the deficit** in the High Needs Block Budget.

The remainder will provide **upfront investment** to the SEND improvement programme - around **£1 million** in 2023/24 and around **£6.5 million** across the whole programme.

Included in the budget for this are:

- Enhanced SEND Local Offer, so that families and professionals can find information advice and support services more easily
- New SEND support service
- Transitions and annual reviews ensuring quality improvement
- Increased capacity in teams that support SEND work



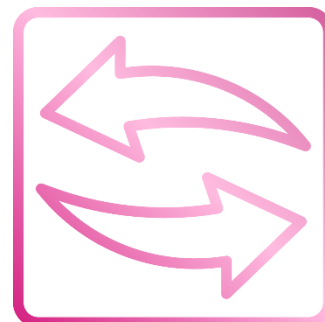
3. High Needs Block

As **beneficiaries of the planned improvements to local SEND services**, we are asking schools to **also make a contribution** to the funding provided by **every household in the borough** and transfer 1% of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Block funding to the DSG High Needs Block to support the required investment in the SEND improvement programme.*

In Wokingham, this amounts to around **£1.4 million** for 2024/25. The same request will be made of Schools Forum for each of the next five years, and schools will be asked for their decision on this for each of those years.

Subject to those annual approvals, this could amount to up to **£7.6 million** across the whole 6 year programme, with the spend directly aligned to the **priorities highlighted by schools**.

None of this funding will go into the DSC cumulative deficit – this funding is **solely for investment in service improvement** that schools will feel the benefit from.



Included in the budget for this are:

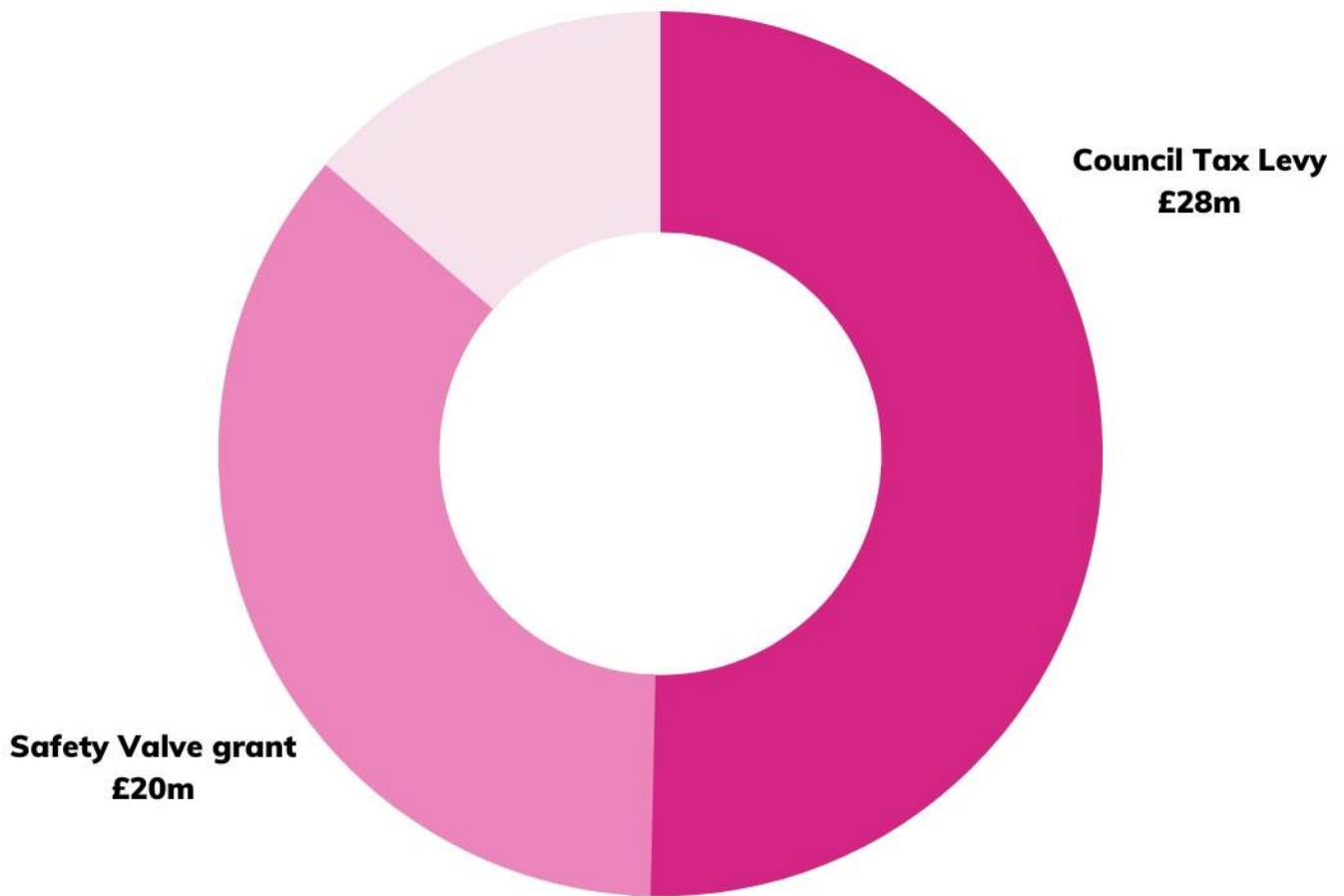
- Proposal to invest an **additional £350k** in new SEND support service providing schools with **faster access to help and support** at SEND Support level
- Increased **investment of £260k in specialist outreach** (above the current spend of circa £650k) – providing easier access to expert advice from specialists across all categories of need
- A **more coordinated** range of support for all vulnerable learners across the borough
- Special school expansions with the introduction of **over 350 additional special schools places** and a minimum of **100 additional places** in SEN Resource Bases or Units attached to mainstream schools
- Post-16 – with the introduction of **new specialist pathways** for students with SEND within the borough – details yet to be determined subject to a needs analysis
- Alternative provision and education other than at school to be **more securely commissioned and quality assured** to provide increased confidence as to the quality of our local provision

The majority of the funding is being secured through investment from the council and Safety Valve. If we are unable to meet the targets agreed with the Department for Education, this could lead to **future Safety Valve payments being withheld**.

**Recent DfE research into ten of the best performing local authorities showed that an early transfer of funds from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block was a game changer in securing a stable and robust financial position.*

**Requested Transfer from DSG
Schools Block to High Needs Block
(subject to Schools Forum vote)
£7.6m**

Investment breakdown



The total required investment under the DSG Deficit Management Plan between 2023/4 and 2028/9 and the proposed sources for this.

Working together to improve SEND education

As we said earlier, this is a **significant piece of work** and one that we are **unable to complete alone**.

Our proposals, based on the priorities you have told us, would deliver **significant improvements for all children with SEND** across the area, and an economically viable SEND system fit to meet the **growing needs** in the area.



What are the benefits to schools?

- A **new SEND support service** and **enhanced specialist outreach offer** - specialist support professionals will support schools to develop and improve the systems, approaches and techniques used for children with SEND.
- **Increased investment** in specialist outreach, focused on **priority areas** including speech and language, social emotional and mental health difficulties, autism and cognition and learning difficulties.
- Funding **invested back into local schools** to support **peer to peer support** and **sharing of local expertise**. The impact of the above measures will be that schools will be better supported to meet needs earlier without the need for EHC Plans and will reduce the number of requests for assessment other than where these are absolutely necessary.
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- For those children with the **most significant needs** there will be an **increased range of specialist provision** – new special free schools and mainstream based provision
- **Improved commissioning** framework for high-quality alternative provision, making it easier for schools to access **secure, quality assured provision**. **Improved communications** with the SEND Team.
- Robustly ensuring consistency of the ‘ordinarily available’ offer across every school – providing **equity and consistency** as to what every school offers.

How can schools work with us?

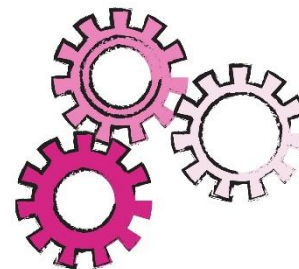
1. We will be **requesting transfer of 1% of the Schools Block** to the High Needs Block annually for the length of the Safety Valve programme.

At this stage all schools are being consulted as to **their views as to these proposals** and the outcome of this consultation will help us to refine and shape our proposals.

The final proposals and the request for the schools block transfer request will then be presented along with other elements of schools budget setting in a **second formal consultation** in September.

The outcome of this second consultation will inform Schools Forum when they vote on the proposed transfer in October 2023.

We recognise that in the current financial climate this request represents a challenge for many schools, particularly smaller schools. There may be ways of **accounting for these challenges** in terms of how the contribution is apportioned between schools but initially we are keen to establish whether our *priorities are correct*.



This transfer is an **expectation of the Safety Valve** agreement and has been identified as a common feature of LAs that manage their High Needs Block effectively, so we hope you feel able to support this request.

2. Improve early intervention and SEND support **before requesting assessments**.

In March 2023, the SEND Team received approximately 90 assessment requests, which is unprecedented in the borough. This was an **increase of 138%** (38 requests) from February 2023.

The scale of the increased demand is the key factor in beginning an individual pupil's escalation through the system **BUT** too often what should have happened at school level hasn't and this means there is an inequity in the system.

We believe that when the new support services are available this will provide alternative options for schools to **address needs earlier** without the need for an EHC Plan.

A collective responsibility and accountability between and across schools, supported as appropriate by LA specialists, will achieve a more manageable and sustainable approach, built on trust and a shared set of expectations.

What's next?

We have a few things in the pipeline in the coming months:

- This first phase of consultation is an **information gathering exercise** to sharpen our focus and ensure that what we are proposing will **meet schools' needs**. We will use the time over the Summer 2023 to refine and develop our proposals
- We will be launching a **second stage consultation** on these final proposals which will go to every school in the borough to ask them for their view on transferring the 1%.
- The results of this second consultation will then go to the Schools Forum, who will use these to help inform their decision on whether the funding should be transferred.

Programme milestones April 2023 to March 2024

- At this stage this consultation only covers the funding for 2024-25; there will be a **similar annual consultation** exercise to seek agreement from schools for the transfer for each of the next five years (we are in year one of the six-year programme already)
- We will be involved in the tendering process for the **two new special schools** and support the opening of **Oak Tree** and the **Addington extension**.
- We will be launching our new **SEN Support Service**.
- We will see the phased launch of **new specialist outreach arrangements**.
- The roll-out of our new model for mainstream support - **Resource Bases and SEND Units** - will begin implementation in 2024.

| Area | Milestone | Planned date / Status |
|---------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Local Offer | Re-launch | September 2023 |
| Early Years | Dingley's Promise re-commissioned | June 2023 |
| SEN Support Service | New service launched | September 2023 |
| Vulnerable Learners Pilot | Decision on pilot extension | April 2023 |
| Resource Bases/SEND Units | New model implemented | September 2023 |
| Addington Expansion | Early Years Centre opens | Autumn 2023 |
| Oak Tree School | New school opens | September 2023 |
| New Free Schools | Bid outcome | April 2023 |
| Post-16/PFA | New guidance and training launched | May 2023 |
| Therapy Services | New contract starts | April 2023 |
| INMSS Commissioning | Additional capacity in place | May 2023 |
| Banding Framework | New framework launched | October 2023 |
| Digital Improvement | Additional capacity in place System supplier awarded | May 2023 November 2023 |
| Decision-Making | Revised governance in place | April 2023 |