

Schools Forum

20th June 2024

Delivering Better Value Programme Update

Recommendation

Schools Forum is recommended to:

- Note and support the DBV workstreams put in place to achieve the ‘Lower Bound Target Mitigation’.

1. Introduction

Schools Forum is aware that the High Needs Block continues to record a significant overspend. This is due to increases in the number of children with EHC plans, increases in the level of need, increases in the number of children placed in specialist provision and increases in unit costs.

To address the overspend on the High Needs Block, the Council is participating in the Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme alongside 54 other local authorities. The programme includes detailed diagnostic investigation to forecast future spend and numbers of children requiring SEND support, and then identifying a small number of high impact workstreams. Following a successful grant application submitted to the DfE, the Council have received confirmation that DBV funding for financial year 2024/25 has been approved for the four workstreams which were identified through consultation with stakeholders.

These workstreams were chosen based on the difference they would make to the local system and there is confidence that delivery of these workstreams will provide long term benefits to the local system for children and young people with SEND.

The below table shows that the Council would be in an upper bound unmitigated deficit of £267m by 2028 if we continue working as we currently are. It also highlights that by working on the four identified workstreams, we will be working towards the lower bound target

Year End	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
UB Unmitigated Deficit*	£ 16m	£ 20m	£ 33m	£ 65m	£ 116m	£ 184m	£ 267m
UB Target Mitigated Deficit*	£ 16m	£ 20m	£ 32m	£ 63m	£ 105m	£ 156m	£ 217m
UB Stretch Mitigated Deficit*	£ 16m	£ 20m	£ 32m	£ 63m	£ 104m	£ 153m	£ 209m
LB Unmitigated Deficit*	£ 16m	£ 20m	£ 33m	£ 53m	£ 87m	£ 133m	£ 191m
LB Target Mitigated Deficit*	£ 16m	£ 20m	£ 32m	£ 50m	£ 78m	£ 112m	£ 152m
LB Stretch Mitigated Deficit*	£ 16m	£ 20m	£ 32m	£ 50m	£ 77m	£ 110m	£ 146m

mitigated deficit of £152m. Whilst this will not eradicate the Council's overspend, the four workstreams are expected to reduce the deficit by £115m.

2. Delivering Better Value

Analysis

2.1 Further to stakeholder engagement and diagnostic exercises completed as part of the DBV programme, the analysis below was concluded:

- Warwickshire has a higher number of requests for EHC needs assessments per head of population compared to national averages.
- Warwickshire has less children with EHC plans in mainstream schools compared to other areas.
- A lack of parental confidence in school inclusion and communication (e.g., reasonable adaptations)
- Through case reviews, it was considered that a significant proportion of children with EHC plans could be supported in SEND resourced provisions rather than special schools.
- Numbers of children in independent specialist provision had been declining until 2022/23
- Unit costs had remained steady until 2023.

Workstream updates

2.2 Resource Provision

The purpose of the Resource Provision (RP) workstream is to establish SEND resource provision across the County to ensure that every locality (rather than every district/borough) has a resourced provision available from nursery age to the end of the statutory school age.

In the last two years, Warwickshire County Council has opened an additional nine resource provisions, creating 84 places, totalling 191 places across 18 sites.

Eight new resource provisions will open in September 2024 creating a further 68 places, increasing the total offer to 251 places for 2024 /25 academic year. This is ahead of the target of 231 places by January 2025.

Over the next five years, the aim is to increase the number of resourced provisions places to over 500 with a priority to develop secondary resourced provision to ensure suitable transition opportunities for children leaving primary school.

The Council continues to be in discussion with schools across the county regarding resource provision opportunities. There remains a shortfall of resource provisions in the secondary phase, particularly in the Nuneaton and Rugby areas.

The resource provision workstream will have the biggest financial impact towards reaching the Lower Bound Target Mitigation by 2028.

2.3 Inclusion Framework

The aim of the Inclusion Framework for Schools workstream is to build local school peer networks to support the way school staff work with children and young people with SEND in mainstream schools. This workstream uses audits, training, and peer support with the aim of strengthening provision and supporting workforce development.

Starting in 2022, a pilot scheme was rolled out across 16 schools in the East Warwickshire area. The roll out of the Inclusion Framework has demonstrated positive results across a number of metrics. For example, the number of requests for assessment decreased in the trial group and those that were made were more successful.

SENCOs from the pilot also responded to a survey measuring a number of KPIs and the results were as follows:

- Confidence **using the SEND inclusion guidance** changed from **40% - 60%** of staff rating themselves as very confident or confident.
- Confidence **recording and monitoring early intervention** changed from **63.2% staff to 75.5%** staff rating themselves as very confident or confident.
- Confidence in **implementing Assess. Plan. Do and Review** changed from **46% - 63.5%** rating themselves as very confident or confident.
- Confidence in **consistently planning and differentiating** for young people with SEND rose from **61.8% to 73.2%** rating themselves as very confident or confident.
- Confidence in **managing additional adult support** increased from **52% to 75%** rating themselves as very confident or confident.

In the pilot scheme, initial results indicate that school inclusion has increased. Staff confidence has shown significant increase and a reduction in unsuccessful decisions to not assess compared with schools not in the pilot scheme.

The Inclusion Framework trial is expanding with 16 schools in Rugby, 15 in Bedworth and there is also agreement for 12 schools in Stratford to join the trial from September 2024.

2.4 Workforce Development

The aim of this workstream is to increase the number of pupils with EHC Plans whose placements are maintained in mainstream settings by sustaining support and increasing confidence in mainstream schools to enable them to meet the needs of children with EHCP's. A group of stakeholders (including special and mainstream schools) are working towards developing a guide to the graduated approach for children and young people who experience SEMH difficulties. This guide will identify core staff training to enable mainstream settings to meet the needs of children and young people with SEMH provision in their EHC Plans.

The workstream will also identify how all mainstream settings can access the training to further share best practice and develop a strategy to support the recruitment and retention of SEND Teaching Assistants in mainstream settings.

The project team:

- have started engagement workshops with stakeholders to gain As-Is practice and To-be mapping, with approximately 30 sessions organised with Headteachers, SENCo's, Early Years Professionals, Teaching Assistants, Pastoral Leads, Heads of Year and Governors.
- continue to engage with Warwickshire Parent Carer Voice (WPCV) and IMPACT, Young People Forum gaining As-Is practice and To-be mapping.
- have launched survey for professionals to anonymously provide As-Is practice and To-be mapping.
- Launched a case study form to gain anonymous best practice and areas of learning examples.
- has identified risks, issues and interdependencies and mitigated for them accordingly.
- Begun preparing the Full Business Case document (due August/Sept 2024)
- is making efforts to try and secure extra project resource (mainstream school representative and STS Business Lead).

Although this workstream is still in the early stages, there has been good engagement from stakeholders.

2.5 Digital Infrastructure

The Digital Infrastructure workstream focusses on investment and development of the system supporting children with EHC plans to improve communication, confidence, and overall productivity. The current digital infrastructure requires multiple systems and extensive use of email for communication and reliance on manual data input. In line with national expectations, the Council is seeking to improve ways of working via an enhanced digital system.

A Digital Infrastructure workstream team are currently working to review the existing system against user requirements to make internal and external technical improvements through development of the existing platform and implantation of upgrades that will close gaps identified by the team.

The workstream will also address Warwickshire County Council user confidence through a comprehensive communication and training package delivered by a system of trained trainers or service specific superusers.

3. Conclusion

The Council continues to make representations for sustainable funding for the High Needs Block. The Council maintains an offset reserve for the cumulative overspend in the High Needs Block. However, in December 2023, Cabinet agreed that based on affordability grounds, no further contributions should be made from Council Tax funding to offset overspends on the High Needs Block after the 2024/25 financial year. Therefore, it is imperative that work continues to mitigate the cost of delivering support for SEND and to improve efficiencies.

The DBV programme will be monitored by the SEND & Inclusion Partnership Board, the Education Transformation Board as well as the regional DfE team. Monitoring of the local High Needs Block will continue to be a function of the Schools Forum.

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