

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM ONLY

AGENDA ITEM

Delivering Better Value in SEND

DATE April 2024

REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Lisa Evans

Delivering Better Value Agreement with DfE.

Summary

The purpose of this report is to advise Cabinet that the Council successfully submitted a revised Delivering Better Value plan (DBV) to DfE on February 19, 2024. The plan was approved on behalf of the Council by the Director of Childrens Services and the Councils 151 Officer after positive scrutiny by DfE advisors and in accordance with delated authority. The Council is now awaiting the formal signature to the plan and agreement by Government Ministers.

Resulting from the submission, the LA is now in Phase 2 of the DBV programme which provides DfE grant funding to support the implementation of the action plan and SBC has been allocated £1m for this purpose. This funding, covering financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25, was originally based on 3 main initiatives but following the re-submission of the DBV plan it has been agreed with DfE to re-align the plan with the 8 DBV initiatives described later in this report (para 7a-h).

The agreement requires the Council to fully mitigate the aggregated DSG deficit by 2027/28 where lasting sustainability and reaching an in-year balance can be demonstrated for its High Needs Funding Budget.

Schools' forum with the DCS and AD for Education agreed to undertake a review of what was needed and how best to delivery for local children and school's forum to look at how they could support with extra places for SEND children who might otherwise need to be placed in expensive independent placements. School leaders were open to suggestions and a range have agreed to either expand existing provision or look at some capital works to create new spaces. Some of this work has begun and other elements are at the feasibility and planning stages.

The school's forum's banding group also agreed to some commissioning work for communication and speech and language needs prioritising work with younger children but also looking at transition work for older children. This is now underway, led by children's head of strategy and commissioning.

School leaders are now looking at creative ways of supporting groups of children with high needs funding rather than just individuals. This could mean moving individuals to be with one or two others to use funding more effectively whilst keeping them attached to a mainstream school.

The work programme described above may well necessitate some invest to save proposals which may not result in immediate savings but should result in a more fit for purpose HN system in Stockton; one that is in-line with the revised DBV plan and that will enable the LA to mitigate the aggregated DSG deficit by 2027/28.

School's forum have been kept abreast of developments and have helped to co-construct these innovative solutions in partnership with LA officers and the Director of Children's Services.

Considerable work has been undertaken to fully understand the needs of children and young people with EHCP plans together with consultation with school leaders and School Forum which has informed a DBV plan that will increase the number of children with a EHCP in mainstream schools through inclusion, improve outcomes for children and young people and reduce the need for EHCP's through earlier access to resources, and reduce costs and the need for out of area and costly settings.

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Background Information

1. The Council entered the original Delivering Better Value agreement 2021/22 with a plan for financial years 2021/22 to 2026/27. The extended plan which now ends in 2027/28 reflects regional sufficiency pressures due to the increase in Children and Young People requiring Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP's).
2. The number of children and young people who have a EHCP in Stockton on Tees is 2048 which represents growth of 41% since 2019 which is consistent with national growth statistics and being reflected in the majority of Local Authorities in the region and nationally.
3. If left unmitigated the number of EHCP's is forecast to reach 2,564 by Jan 2027 which would result in an unmitigated aggregated deficit of £34.8m by the end of 2027/28 compared with a 2023/2024 forecast deficit of £3.57m.
4. A significant amount of work has been undertaken by Childrens Services and Finance and Performance Data colleagues which has informed the demand for EHCP's by the age and primary needs of children and young people requiring EHCP's and the sufficiency and budget required to meet these needs.
5. The SEND needs, sufficiency and budget analysis is the most comprehensive the Council has undertaken in this area, is the first time that detailed demand has been aligned with costs and has informed and enabled the production of a DBV plan that will improve outcomes for children and young people by meeting their needs earlier and increasing sufficiency in local mainstream schools; reducing the demand for EHCP's through earlier prevention and reducing budgets by reducing the necessity of more complex plans and out of area sufficiency.
6. The needs analysis evidences the increase in demand for services for children and young people with ASC (autism spectrum condition), SEMH (social, emotional, and mental health) and SLCN (speech, language and communication needs). Growth in these and other demands put pressure on in area sufficiency and budget sustainability through the need for out of area special and independent schools.

7. The evidence based needs analysis with the input of school leader has provided the key influencers on the plan and informed the following key strategies within it:-

a. Strengthen support in early years.

This project will upskill early years settings and practitioners, providing training opportunities and invest in appropriate resource to identify and meet need at the earliest opportunity through specialist knowledge and intervention. Objectives will also be achieved through the commissioning with schools and settings of quality speech and language intervention as well as communication and oracy support.

b. Increase training and support locally.

A robust CPD programme which will be available to stakeholders including schools, settings, and parents, with a particular focus to those working directly with children in the classroom. The aim of this will be to both provide support and sustainable skills in the workforce to embed good practice.

c. Strengthen local offer through greater buy in from partners.

Development of an integrated services model covering sensory support (HI/VI) speech and language, occupational therapy and we will develop a front door service for families. A Team around the School Service will work in targeted schools to navigate the array of services both within children's services but also health, police, community support and the wider local area providing a one stop shop to bring a variety of agencies together to work in complete partnership with the school.

d. Strengthen EHC Plan Annual Review process to ensure EHC Plans meet the needs of all children.

A robust review of current policy and process to ensure it meets statutory requirements but is also accessible to families, children and young people with clear pathways and strengthened outcomes. This will be completed in conjunction with the DfE Change programme and with the partnership of the parent carer forum.

e. Increase capacity in local schools through capital projects.

Increasing specialist placements locally within mainstream schools and introducing SEN Units and creating additional enhanced mainstream school places in line with rising need. These will be a combination of expansions, new provisions and creative solutions from mainstream schools. Special schools have also agreed to offer support where needed.

f. Review of alternative provision and specialist support

Addressing the rising challenges of high numbers of pupils at risk of, or permanently excluded from schools in Stockton and ensuring alternative provision is high quality and meets need and demand alongside early intervention to identify and support needs of children.

g. Develop and implement a strategic banding review for mainstream schools.

A review of the high needs funding banding system currently in place to ensure it meets the needs of children and supports school to invest in their provision and support effectively. This has been developed in collaboration with schools and is looking at the creative use of funding beyond the one child focus.

h. Develop our post 16 offer to create more opportunities and clear pathways.

Development of a hybrid post 16 provision and increased opportunities for supported internships, alongside strengthening pathways and transition planning.

Consultation and Engagement

As part of work with schools forum, the parent carer forum and bespoke strategic sessions with a range of school leaders and council officers ideas have been considered developed and worked through. Families and young people have also been consulted and engaged fully in the process.

Next Steps

7. We will appoint a temporary post for the strategic lead of DBV for initially 12 months and, work with the DfE and local partners to develop good practice and continue to work with schools to develop capital work and feasibility for future projects while also giving consideration of the AP Free School. Specific next steps are as follows:

Project Milestones	By When
Implementation of resourced provision in Stockton Schools which will highlight good practice and areas of expertise and used to fill gaps within other schools.	September 2024: Phase 1 September 2025: Phase 2
Development of a SEND Front Door Service to address inequalities with parental support, satisfaction and lived experience.	May 2024: Implementation
Development of a comprehensive SEN Support strategy starting from the early years outlining our commitment to support children with SEN in mainstream schools and promoting an inclusive learning environment for all.	January 2025: Completion of strategy
Investment in specialised SEND services including educational psychologists, speech therapists and occupational therapists who will provide tailored support to meet the needs of our children with SEND.	Summer 2024: Discovery Phase
Implementation of strengthened multi-agency collaboration through SEND Development Group strategic partners aligned. This will address needs holistically and promote seamless transitions between services and phases of education.	April 2024: Group establishment
Invest in CPD, ongoing training and development opportunities to strengthen and enhance inclusive e teaching practices in mainstream classrooms.	July 2024: Initial Implementation
A robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of the implementation plan and identify continuous improvement and sufficiency.	December 2024

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