

Bristol Schools Forum
Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND Programme

Date of meeting:	26 September 2023
Time of meeting:	5.00 pm
Venue:	Virtual/City Hall
Officer Presenting Report	Reena Bhogal-Welsh

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To inform and update the School's Forum on the progress of the Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND Programme (the Programme).

2. Recommendation

School's Forum is invited to:

- 2.1 Review the progress to date and next steps for implementation of the DBV programme.

3. Background – Delivering Better Value in SEND (As outlined in the School Forum Report 12 July 2023)

- 3.1 Alongside existing plans, the Department for Education recognises the challenge faced by Local Authorities and is running intervention programmes, including Safety Valve Agreements and Delivering Better Value in SEND (DBV in SEND). In late 2022, Bristol was invited to participate in the DBV in SEND programme. A paper outlining the preliminary findings of the DBV programme was presented to Schools Forum on 12 January 2023.
- 3.2 Upon completion of a 6-month diagnostic period, a grant application based on diagnostic findings was submitted to the DfE. In total Bristol secured a £1m grant to pump-prime deficit mitigation interventions identified through the programme.

3.3 The diagnostic identified that the unmitigated deficit position of the High Needs Block will increase to £116m (lower bound) over the next 5 years. This is primarily due to an increase in spend in the following provision areas:

- Increase in number of EHCPs issued
- Non-statutory top up funding (mainstream provision)
- Bristol-based specialist provision (cost of placement and increased numbers of pupils entering special schools)
- Post-16 provision

3.4 The focus of Bristol's grant application to the DfE focused on the delivery of 2 key workstreams:

***Workstream 1:
Strengthening relationships between the school, families and children
(improving the experiences of children with SEND in mainstream settings)***

We will work in partnership with a cross phase group of education partners, families and children to develop and implement a pilot programme to improve the experience of children with SEND in mainstream education. The pilot will focus on enhancing school-based inclusion practice and improving school-to-family communication with the aim of rebuilding parental confidence in current SEND arrangements and reducing the demand for specialist placements, in situations when a child's needs can be effectively met within mainstream. The aim of the trial is to create an eco-system of inclusive Bristol schools to act as inclusion champions, provide peer-to-peer support, disseminate learning and model best practice to support further role out across the Bristol education system.

***Workstream 2:
Strengthening relationships between the school and the wider system
(Creating fair, transparent, consistent and financially sustainable processes underpinned by robust monitoring and accountability frameworks)***

We will undertake a further analysis and review of Bristol's existing SEND funding model to identify, define and measure problems relating to efficiency, effectiveness and value for money. A detailed options appraisal will be developed for full public consultation in the areas of:

- a) Effective and sustainable use of non-statutory top up funding
- b) Standardisation of statutory top-up funding and the model for funding Bristol's special schools (maintained and academies)
- c) Realignment of Post-16 funding to ensure adherence to current DfE/ESFA guidelines – including review of use of non-statutory top up funding.

Our intention is to create a fair, transparent, consistent and financially sustainable model, that achieves good outcomes for CYP with SEND through robust monitoring and accountability frameworks. We will use co-production with parents/carers, children and education partners to ensure the change process is collaborative, clearly communicated, understood and fit for purpose. Robust analysis of the key impact measures, relating to ensuring more CYP's needs are effectively met earlier and within mainstream education will be key, along with the changes as a mechanism to increase parental confidence in Bristol's mainstream provision. The use of external benchmarking and adherence to current and future legislation will underpin all transformation.

4. Background information and context of the Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme

4.1 The DBV Programme is part of a wider programme of work to address the deficit in the Dedicated School's Grant (DSG). This Programme includes work set out in the High Needs Block Recovery Plan, which was approved by School's Forum in September 2022.

4.2 The DSG programme is part of a wider *Our Families* programme focusing on the transformation of children and young people services in Bristol. The *Our Families* Board is now Chaired by the Director of Children's Transformation following the departure of the Executive Director for Children and Education.

5. Update on the Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme since July 2023

5.1 A DSG Programme Team and Steering Group has been established. The Programme Team consists of a Strategic Programme Lead for SEND, a Senior Project Manager, 2 x Project Managers and a Project Support Officer. These roles are funded using a mix of the £1.6m allocated from the High Needs Block in April 2023 to support the wider transformation agenda and the £1m DBV grant allocation.

5.2 A Programme Governance structure has been established to align with the existing SEND Governance Structure in Bristol (Figure 1)

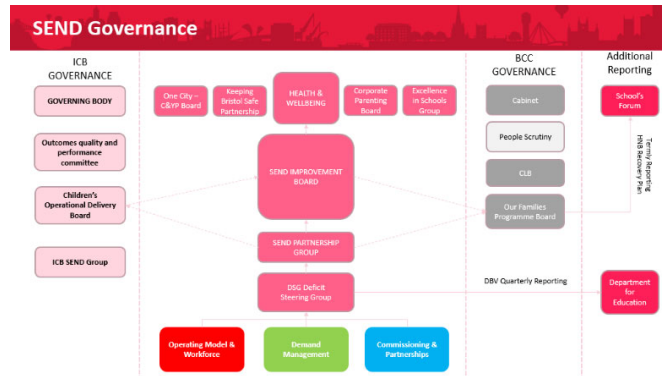


Fig. 1 - Programme Governance

- 5.3 A multi-stakeholder planning workshop to develop Workstream 1 took place on the 6 July 2023. Workstream 1 will be delivered using a *Test and Learn* methodology, working with small groups of schools to improve relationships between schools and families. A minimum of 4 Test and Learn pilots will take place between September 2023 and 30 March 2024. The first of these Test and Learn pilots will commence on the 19 September 2023, with a presentation on the approach to the 4 schools. Test and Learn Pilot 1 will focus on reviewing and codesigning SEND Guidance Reports with staff and parents/carers in 4 participating schools.
- 5.4 A combination of inclusion data will be used to identify a group of priority schools to take part in the Test and Learn pilots. By combining these data sets, it is expected that up to 20 schools will be identified with a split of 15 primary and 5 secondary settings. The intention is to work with up to 12 of these schools in groups of up to 4 between September 2023 and April 2024. The evaluation work will be completed to inform school participation in Test and Learn Pilot 2. Due to time constraints leading up to the summer holidays a reduced selection criteria were used. The schools selected for Test and Learn Pilot 1 were identified using comparisons in pupil premium and education health and plan (EHCP) percentages.
- 5.5 [Private Public Ltd.](#), in collaboration with [Social Finance](#), were selected to lead the delivery of Workstream 2 following a full competitive procurement process - completed in July 2023. Workstream 2 is currently in the analysis phase. This has included interviews with internal and external stakeholders (schools), analysis of SEND funding data and national benchmarking and

best practice. The analysis stage also includes a detailed mapping of the existing decision-making and funding process.

- 5.6 An options paper outlining proposed changes to the way Bristol City Council uses High Needs Block funding will be put forward for a full 6-week consultation phase in early October 2023. Following this consultation phase a final recommendation will be presented to Bristol's City Council's Cabinet for approval in late January 2024. Due to delays in the procurement process the initial consultation and decision date have shifted. The new dates have been approved following a recent review meeting with the DfE. School's Forum will be provided with details on how to engage with the consultation. Additionally, the School's Forum will be provided with a full report on the outcome of the consultation at the November forum.
- 5.7 The contract for Workstream 2 is significantly below the initial £600,000 estimate. Bristol City Council has been given permission by the Department of Education to submit a proposal to use the underspend to support the implementation of Workstream 2 following the Cabinet decision. Funding must be spent in the financial year 2023/24. An update on this proposal will be presented to a future School's Forum.