

# South Gloucestershire Council

## Schools Forum

4 July 2024

## High Needs Working Group Update

### 1. Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the work of the High Needs Working Group (HNWG).

### 2. Background

2.1 The Schools Forum has agreed to transfer £2.2 million of funding from the School Block to the High Needs Block to support investment which will enable improvements and more effective delivery of outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and involve more efficient use of resources. It is essential that accelerated progress in addressing the current in-year deficit on the High Needs budget can be demonstrated.

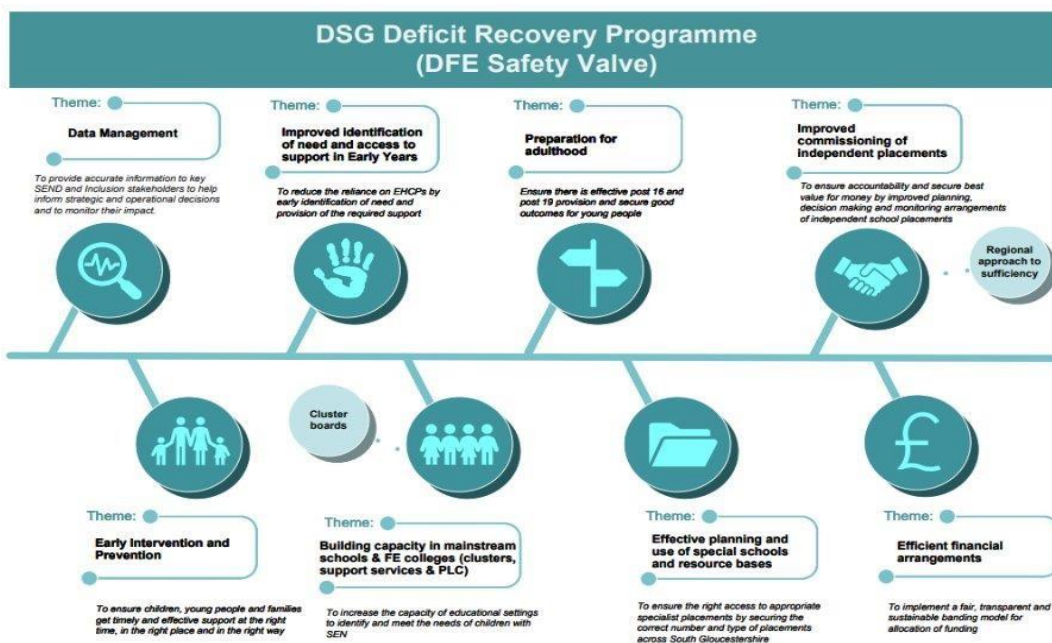
2.2 A deficit recovery programme of work has been formulated by HNWG with an agreed governance and reporting structure through Schools Forum and senior leaders of South Gloucestershire Council.

2.3 There are eight priority areas of focus (themes), outlined which are providing the framework and opportunity to improve outcomes, provision, and efficiency across the local area and reduce expenditure. These themes feed into the overall deficit recovery plan which we have agreed with the DfE and there are positive impact measures identified which we include in updates when data is available to demonstrate progress. The work of the HNWG is therefore aligned with the Deficit Recovery Plan. It should also be noted that the deficit recovery plan has formed the basis of the Safety Valve agreement with the DfE, and we are required to report to the DfE quarterly on progress in achieving the targets which the Council and Schools Forum have agreed.

2.4 The eight priority themes are shown in the diagram below and the aims of each are as follows:

1. **Early and accurate identification of special educational need** to provide an effective response at SEN support so that more children and young people have the benefit of support from the earliest point. This means that only those children and young people whose needs can only be met through an Education, Health and Care Plan must undergo a formal assessment and issue of a plan to have their needs met. A key element of this theme is the work undertaken by the school-led clusters in building capacity in schools to support early and accurate identification of need and provision of an effective response by the schools in their cluster.
2. **Financial arrangements for Education, Health, and Care Plans** to ensure that the level of top-up funding provided for EHC plans is appropriate and proportionate to the needs of the child and young person.
3. **Early and accurate identification of need in the early years** and provision of an effective response from settings in the early years sector. As for theme 1 the focus is on ensuring children with special educational needs in the early years have their needs identified early and that children can access support, without the requirement for an EHC Plan, if appropriate or provision of an EHC Plan from the earliest point when essential to meet need.
4. **Commissioning** to ensure that commissioning of places in the independent sector is outcomes focussed and resources are used efficiently so that we can be confident that we are getting value for money for high level of expenditure involved.

5. **Effective planning and use of maintained special school and specialist provision** (Resource Base and Access Centre) to ensure level and type of specialist provision within the maintained sector continues to meet the needs of children and young people across the local area. This is in terms of numbers of places available, the specialist designation of the provision and the balance of specialist provision in mainstream and special school sectors. This is also to ensure use of more costly specialist provision in the independent sector is at a level which makes most efficient use of resources.
6. **Data Management** to ensure access to accurate data via Mosaic to enable an accurate understanding of needs of children and young people across the system and to support strategic planning of provision across the local area.
7. **Preparing for Adulthood/Post 16** to develop the arrangements we have in place to support children and young people with special educational needs to live independently as adults. This is in terms of access to appropriate support whilst children and young people so that they develop essential skills necessary and to be able to choose from a range of opportunities when they leave school.
8. **Early Intervention/Alternative Provision.** This theme has developed to include a focus on Alternative Provision (AP) and whether the short-stay arrangements commissioned by the LA for all children and young people, the majority of which have special educational needs, is meeting the needs of the system and making most effective use of the resources available. Importantly, how expert capacity in the AP/special sector can be used in a preventative way to build capacity in mainstream so that more children and young people can have their needs met in mainstream and feel they belong in their home school and that arrangements for early intervention are sustainable in the longer-term.



### 3. Programme governance structure and communication

3.1 HNWG take their direction from the Schools Forum, provide consultation, direction, support, and challenge to the HNWG officers leading and managing the work involved in each theme workstream.

3.2 The communication flow continues to be well-understood by the members and officers. The timelines for HNWG and Schools Forum are closely aligned and there is a clear recognition of the need to regularly update the wider stakeholders on developments from the HNWG. Suitable and appropriate opportunities for relevant communications direct to the wider leaders across the LA are considered as part of each HNWG agenda which is supporting the broader system awareness, understanding and engagement across the sector.

## 4. DSG High Needs Block and Safety Valve

### 4.1 Update for Schools Forum meeting 4 July 2024

- **Early and accurate identification of special educational need**

As shared previously the work of the clusters has contributed to an improved balance in relation to the percentage of children and young people having their needs met at SEN Support and those requiring an EHC Plan. The proportion of children at each level is now in line with national average for most needs. However, we are still out of line with national for SEMH across all ages and furthest from national at secondary.

There has been a focus on exclusions where there has been a significant increase and many children who are permanently excluded are then referred for an EHC Plan. Although this may be appropriate, it does raise a concern about accurate and early identification of need and the effectiveness of the response in mainstream.

Analysis of early help initiatives and interventions available to schools has resulted in clusters commissioning more support for children and young people at highest risk of exclusion, specifically those interventions shown to have greatest impact – Education Inclusion Officer project led by the Youth Offending Partnership.

Other areas of focus have included ways to ensure that secondary schools have opportunity to participate in the clusters and consequently we have seen an increase in participation.

Additionally, a greater focus on clear links between the clusters and the high-risk group (HRG) to ensure a coherent approach. For HRG this has been extended to include partners i.e. those working with police and social care. An emergency HRG has also been established to respond to a small number of cases when a rapid response is required.

- **Financial arrangements for Education, Health, and Care Plans**

This workstream has now closed and has moved into the implementation phase.

- **Early and accurate identification of need in the early years**

A report on this workstream has been included as an item on the main agenda today in response to a request from Schools Forum for details of the plans for targeting the £200K funding available. Good progress is being made in the workstream.

- **Commissioning**

Timely progress was being made on ensuring an effective approach in the award of and management of contracts. However, some of the work has been impacted through short-term changes to staffing and the need to recruit interim cover for maternity. This work will resume shortly.

It is worth highlighting to Schools Forum that the closure of Sheilings School has involved identification of new placements, at increased cost, in the independent sector. The work to identify new places for all children impacted by the closure is continuing but we know that overall, the closure will have a negative financial impact on the budget. Details of this will be provided at the next meeting.

- **Effective planning and use of maintained special school and specialist provision.**

Officers have been working with Mastodon C who specialise in Children Services and data science. MC have been analysing our population data on SEND to inform our work on sufficiency planning so that we can work with schools and services to ensure we have enough specialist school places for pupils with special educational needs. The key findings of this work so far are shown below. Delivery of additional places and the pace of delivery is subject to having sufficient capital for investment and we had been raising with DfE through the Safety

Valve. Prior to the announcement of a General Election the DfE had contacted us to say that they would meet to consider further, so we now await that opportunity.

**There is a clear need to increase the SEMH capacity at both the primary and secondary phase.**

- The demand for SEMH is projected to increase with projected undercapacity of around forty-five places by 2028. We were aware of this pressure and have a plan to address in part although further work is required.
- There is an increasing demand for SEMH and/or SLCN designated secondary provision of up to seventy places which are currently all met outside of South Gloucestershire.

**There is capacity across the special schools to meet the needs of pupils with learning and communication and interaction needs but it is not necessarily in the right place.**

- The demand for places for pupils with moderate learning and communication and interaction needs is projected to exceed capacity by 80 in 2028.
- Severe learning difficulties and communication and interaction needs is projected to remain the same and decline against a backdrop of increasing provision with the opening of Two Bridges.
- Complex learning disabilities (learning difficulties alongside other needs such as autism) are increasing in secondary against already high numbers but decreasing in the primary phase. The projection is that we will need a further forty places by 2028.

**The demand for specialist places for pupils with sensory and physical needs is projected to decline.**

- There is a need to review our resourced based provisions which are hosted in mainstream schools to ensure that the provisions meet the needs of our future learners.
- This will involve working with schools and stakeholders to develop the provision to meet the areas of growing demand. For example, improving the offer for learners with SEMH needs and high anxiety which is presenting as emotional based school avoidance has been a growing group in recent years.

▪ **Data Management**

This workstream has now closed with all necessary changes to the management information system completed and reports available as required for planning and reporting purposes.

▪ **Preparing for Adulthood/Post 16**

This workstream has commenced with a focus on two key areas:

- Involvement of the social care team leading on the development of the Preparing for Adulthood offer.
- Development of a new Education, Employment and Training (EET) strategy for care leavers and SEND, establishment of an EET Forum to provide strategic direction for the work and oversee delivery of a new offer, and an agreed action plan.

▪ **Early Intervention/Alternative Provision**

We have been in discussion with AP providers for some time about the need to commission support for mainstream schools, utilising expertise in the system in a preventative way, to facilitate retention of pupils in mainstream. However, the ability to offer that support is limited by the capacity available which is currently fully used in responding to statutory duties, i.e. response to permanent exclusions and children and young people with medical needs.

Additionally, the length of stay in short-stay provision is significantly longer for many children and young people than we should expect which is also impacting on the effective and efficient use of the places available to meet the needs of children and young people across the system. It is the case that the local authority is at risk of not meeting its statutory duties through the current arrangements as we are limited by the current commissioning arrangements given that

up to this point arrangements involve a single provider. Consequently, a project is being established to consider alternative options for meeting the needs of medical needs students in the first instance, which will ensure greater choice and potentially create capacity for early intervention.

#### **4.2 Communications messages**

Generally timely progress across workstreams, however we need to increase pace in some workstreams if we are to achieve the potential efficiencies that we believe exist within the system, albeit in the context of increased demand.

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