

To: **The Executive**
September 2024

SEND improvement update
Executive Director People

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To update the Executive on progress made to the end of April 2024 on the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Written Statement of Action (WSOA) implementation and progress made to the end of May 2024 on the implementation of the Safety Valve programme, as well as wider SEND improvement work.

2 Recommendation(s)

That the Executive notes:

- 2.1 the progress made on implementing the SEND WSOA to improve services to children and families and the feedback from the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England following the fifth review meeting with the DfE and NHS England.
- 2.2 the progress made on delivering the Safety Valve intervention programme up until submission of the first monitoring report to the DfE in May 2024.
- 2.3 progress made on special educational needs services.

3 Reasons for recommendation(s)

- 3.1 When the WSOA was produced it was agreed that the Executive would have updates on progress made on implementation of the plan, following the DfE and NHS England reviews. The WSOA updates have since been expanded to provide the Executive with information on the Safety Valve programme and broader SEND improvement work.

4 Alternative options considered

- 4.1 None.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The fifth review meeting with the DfE and NHS England took place on 02 May 2024 and the first Safety Valve monitoring report was submitted to the DfE on 28 May 2024. The Executive was due to receive an update at its July 2024 meeting, however the pre-election period meant that the DfE was unable to provide written feedback until after the general election. As a result, the quarterly Executive update was rescheduled to this September meeting.
- 5.2 Written feedback provided by the DfE after the May WSOA review meeting acknowledged that there is a clear and effective commitment from all stakeholders to maintain focus on delivery of the remaining WSOA actions. The DfE noted that many of the actions from the original WSOA are now complete, with evidence of impact and a commitment to a business-as-usual approach.
- 5.3 It was acknowledged at the WSOA review meeting that although some parents and carers have not yet seen the impact of the improvements being made, the Parent Carer Forum (PCF) were positive about the work being done, and their level of involvement. The DfE noted that there are more opportunities for parents and carers to meet with the SEND team and membership of the PCF is steadily increasing.

5.4 School representatives present at the WSOA review meeting were positive about the changes being made, including the phased approach to the revised graduated approach documentation. They acknowledged the financial pressures but could see that the council is prioritising SEND. School representatives did seek reassurance about the alignment of the outstanding WSOA work and the Safety Valve programme.

5.5 During the WSOA review meeting, the local area presented evidence of the impact that the work is having for children, young people, families and partner agencies. Notable areas of improvement and impact include:

- All strategies and policies identified in the WSOA scope have been reviewed, with new coproduced strategies in place and published.
- The Phase Transfer process was effectively managed this year, with 98% of families having schools named by the deadlines, and positive feedback received on communication during this process.
- Coproduction sessions have been held for children and young people with SEND to help them to develop their knowledge and skills in coproduction.
- Data at the time of the WSOA review meeting showed that average waiting times for occupational therapy assessment had risen slightly, and there was a slight increase in the number of children and young people waiting longer than 52 weeks for assessment. However, the longest wait had decreased from 83 weeks to 64 weeks.
- The new East Berkshire learning disability and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) was launched in January 2024.
- A series of training sessions have been delivered for SENDCos and school support staff on supporting children and young people with autism. Feedback from these sessions has acknowledged how valuable the training has been, with evidence provided that school staff are utilising the tools and resources provided during the training to improve inclusions and support to children and young people in mainstream settings.
- A successful preparing for adulthood (PFA) roadshow event was held, with 47 exhibitors and over 340 visitors. Feedback on the event was very positive, with children and young people commenting that they intend to follow up on opportunities they learnt about at the event, and parents and carers comments including how the event enabled them to start having conversations about the future, had given them hope, and how positive the post-16 offer is.
- A 'pathway to adulthood' guide and a 'moving on in education' document have been coproduced and published.
- With support from the DfE, National Development Team for Inclusion (NTDI) delivered two training sessions on preparation for adulthood, which were attended by approximately 100 people from the local area partnership.
- The new Local Offer website was coproduced, tested and launched, with much improved functionality and access to information.
- A successful bid to the short break's innovation fund was being used to develop a 6-week programme for children and young people from year 9 to age 25 who are socially isolated and need support to develop independence.

5.6 During the review meeting, the council acknowledged that progress on area 8 – insufficient long-term planning for young people as they move into adulthood – had been delayed and that plans are being developed to ensure appropriate resource is allocated to support delivery in

this area, as part of a wider restructure of the SEND team. A job description is currently being developed for a Post 16 strategic role to work across the council in developing post 16 provision working with local providers. This role will also work with council officers and local business to develop supported internship for young people with SEND.

- 5.7 Written feedback following the Written Statement of action (WSOA) May review meeting with DfE and NHS England was received on 5 August 2024. This feedback states *“It is clear that the local area partnership is committed to establishing more inclusive cultures to improve SEND services for the children and young people in Bracknell Forest. The evidence provided, alongside the feedback from partners, demonstrated the range of actions in place to secure clear and sustained improvement across all areas of significant weakness identified at your Area SEND inspection in November 2021.”*
- 5.8 Having considered the evidence provided in advance of, during and after the review meeting, the DfE is satisfied that they no longer need to continue with formal monitoring of three areas:
- Area 1 – lack of a clear, co-produced strategy for how the much-needed improvements and change will be brought about;
 - Area 4 – lack of appropriate educational provision for a significant proportion of children and young people with SEND in the borough;
 - Area 5 – the lack of support available to children and young people while waiting excessive amounts of time to access occupational therapy services. Also, the lack of capacity in the occupational therapy team, resulting in delays in their contributions to education health & care plans.

The DfE and NHS England will continue to monitor in detail the remaining six areas of significant weakness but have stated that because of the clear commitment from the partnership to continue progress, they will decrease the frequency of monitoring to every six months rather than quarterly.

- 5.9 In March 2024, the council entered into a Safety Valve agreement with the Department for Education. In recognition of the overlap between our ongoing Written Statement of Action (WSOA) activity, implementation of our SEND Strategy and the Safety Valve programme, a review of governance and delivery mechanisms has been conducted and new arrangements implemented. The new governance arrangements allow for strategic oversight of all areas of improvement activity, whilst reducing duplication, streamlining activity, and enabling opportunities for challenge at both operational and strategic level.
- 5.10 The Safety Valve (SV) agreement contains five conditions that the council is monitored on. On 28 May 2024, the council submitted its first Safety Valve monitoring report to the DfE. The DfE reviewed the council’s monitoring report and, with no further information requested or points of clarification raised, released the next £1.6m of funding to the council to continue with delivery of the programme.
- 5.11 The first SV condition is “strengthen early intervention services and work with schools to build an inclusive culture, so that more children and young people’s needs are met within mainstream education”. The new graduated approach has been piloted and rolled out, with training, guidance and support materials created for schools, and a parent and carer support document drafted. The newly established transition team is in post and has started working with the first cohort of students. Feedback from schools has been extremely positive.
- 5.12 The second SV condition is “expand local provision through building a new autism school and social emotional mental health (SEMH) school, alongside expanding existing specialist resource provisions and utilising them as centres of excellence which will provide outreach services across the local authority”. An academy trust, Propeller Trust, has been appointed by the DfE to run the new 100 place autism school, which has been named Forest View, and will

be located at the Bucklers Park site. The DfE is leading on delivery of the new school and is currently commissioning technical advisers to prepare feasibility study. The school was originally planned to be opened in late 2026, however the DfE's current plan is for construction to be complete, and the school handed over in March 2027.

- 5.13 The initial design phase for the new 50 place SEMH school is complete, and a pre-planning application was submitted in May 2024. The procurement approach for procuring the main contractor has been agreed and the first stage of the procurement has commenced. Following the free school presumption route, the council has put out the application process for academy trusts to run the SEMH school, with an application deadline of the end of September. The first cohort for the school is due to start in September 2025 at a temporary site.
- 5.14 Through the Safety Valve programme, the council has successfully secured an additional £4million of capital funding to develop new specialist provision. Following a consultation undertaken by Sandhurst and Edgbarrow schools, these schools have been confirmed as the locations for two new secondary Specialist Resource Provisions (SRPs). The Sandhurst SRP, which will provide 25 new places, will open in September 2024 to support children and young people with communication and interaction needs. The Edgbarrow SRP, which will also provide 25 places, will open in September 2025 to support children and young people with autism.
- 5.15 A review of all primary SRPs has been completed, with new admissions criteria in place and published on the Local Offer website. New service level agreements are also in place for the SRPs, and a training programme has been established for staff working in SRPs. The first training sessions have been delivered, and further training delivered by health colleagues planned in the new academic year.
- 5.16 The closure of College Hall was agreed by Executive members on 21st May 2024. Review of all the children and young people attending College Hall has been undertaken and appropriate placement in relation to their needs has been secured. The formal human resource processes are nearing conclusion.
- 5.17 The third SV condition is "pioneer the use of technology in establishing an efficient service to support children and young people who are unable to attend school due to medical needs". During the summer term, AV1 telepresence robots were trialled in a few schools within the borough, with positive feedback received. The official rollout of the extended, individualised offer for children and young people who are unable to attend school due to medical needs is planned for the new academic year, with training from the providers of the technology planned for headteachers and school representatives in September.
- 5.18 The fourth SV condition is "review the process for commissioning and managing independent sector placements". The council has also joined the cross regional arrangements group CCRAG (Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group)) supporting quality assurance, market management and enabling us to manage annual uplift requests relating to independent & non-maintained special school (INMSS) placements. An approach to managing uplifts for all education providers for 2024/25 has been developed, agreed, and embedded. The commissioning team, working closely with SEND managers, has successfully led negotiations with several providers, limiting the uplifts agreed this financial year.
- 5.19 The fifth SV condition is "improve the way high need services work with local health services". Engagement with health colleagues is underway to secure sufficient capacity from health colleagues to ensure appropriate medical oversight is present at a child's referral into the flexible learning service (formerly tuition service). Work with General Practitioners has also taken place to provide training on the graduated approach and the support available within other services across the council to meet the needs of children and young people who are medically unfit for school.

- 5.20 Recruitment into the new SEND structure has taken place, and all roles have been appointed to. Applicants are currently serving their notice periods with their current employers, and it is expected that by mid-October, all roles within the SEND team will be filled by substantive staff. This is a significant move forward which will bring stability within the Service. There are only three agency staff currently within the team one will cease their employment at the end of September and the other two at the end of October 24. This will ensure a robust handover whilst new staff are onboarded.
- 5.21 A skills audit of the SEND team has been undertaken and a programme of training is being developed with the aim of rolling out the training from September 3rd onwards.
- 5.22 As part of the new government's 100-day plan, several initiatives for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have been identified. Their plan focuses on improving the SEND system through various measures which includes national standards, improving transitions, workforce development, accountability and redress and financial sustainability. An update on any new initiatives, and the implications for Bracknell Forest Council will be included in future updates to the Executive.
- 5.23 Development of the SEND Self Evaluation (known as the SEF) is currently underway which is linked to the New Local Area Care Quality Commission (CQC) /Ofsted Inspection Framework. The SEF is being co-produced across the local area.
- 5.24 Bracknell Forest is due to undergo a local area inspection under the new framework. A core group of senior stakeholders across the local area are in place to prepare for the inspection.
- 5.25 Complaints within the SEND Statutory Service have seen a reduction compared to the previous year Q1 monitoring period. The number of complaints equated to 49 in 2023 compared to 28 in 2024.

6 Consultation and other considerations

Legal advice

- 6.1 The relevant legal issues are addressed within the body of the report.

Financial advice

- 6.2 Through its participation in the Safety Valve programme, the Council has agreed to implement a robust plan to reduce spending on high needs block expenditure down to the level of grant provided through the Dedicated Schools Grant over a period of six year. A substantial amount of the council's reserves will be required to clear the cumulative deficit.

Other consultation responses

- 6.3 Progress is monitored regularly by the SEND improvement partnership board and via meetings and reporting to the DfE. Feedback is incorporated into this report.

Equalities impact assessment

- 6.4 There are no specific equalities issues relating to this update and the equalities screening was carried out at the start of individual projects and programmes.

Strategic risk management Issues

- 6.5 There are no specific strategic risk management issues relating to this update as they considered when the WSOA and Safety Valve programme were produced.

Climate change implications

- 6.6 There are no specific climate change implications relating to this update as they were considered when the WSOA and Safety Valve programme were produced.

Health and wellbeing considerations

6.7 There are no specific health and wellbeing considerations relating to this update as they were considered when the WSOA and Safety Valve programme were produced.

Background papers

DfE progress review meeting slide deck May 2024

Bracknell Forest WSOA Review May 2024

Contact for further information:

Grainne Siggins, Executive Director: People - 01344 354182

grainne.siggins@bracknell-forest.gov.uk