

To: **Schools Forum**
19 September 2024

Safety Valve update
Executive Director: People

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To update the Schools Forum on progress made on the implementation of the Safety Valve programme, as well as wider SEND improvement work.

2 Recommendation(s)

That the Schools Forum notes:

- 2.1 The progress made on delivering the Safety Valve intervention programme up until submission of the first monitoring report to the DfE in May 2024.

3 Reasons for recommendation(s)

- 3.1 When the Safety Valve programme was established it was agreed that the Schools Forum would have updates on progress made on implementation of the plan.

4 Alternative options considered

- 4.1 None.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 The Safety Valve 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.
- 5.3 On 28 August 2024, the council submitted its second Safety Valve monitoring report to the DfE. At the time of publication, feedback has not yet been received (expected by the end of September), and therefore a further update will be provided at the next Schools Forum meeting.
- 5.4 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.

- 5.5 The second SV condition is “expand local provision through building a new autism school and SEMH school, alongside explaining existing SRPs, 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.
- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 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 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.
- 5.8 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.
- 5.9 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 HR processes are nearing conclusion.
- 5.10 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 trialed 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.
- 5.11 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 CCRAAG (Children’s Cross Regional Arrangements Group)) supporting quality assurance, market management and enabling us to manage annual uplift requests relating to 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.
- 5.12 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 GPs 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.

- 5.13 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 Forum

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 were 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

None

Contact for further information:

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