

SEND – Addressing a Shared Challenge

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SEND Transformation - Background

- SEND activity across the Authority (High Needs Block and Core SEND Budget) currently makes up around 12.5% of our gross budget. Budget requirement has however increased 130% in 5 years, at a time of wider budget restraint.
- Over the past ten years, system has been under sustained pressure. Growing demand for plans exacerbated by historic process and practice issues. Significant financial deficit accrued through to 2023, coupled with poor Ofsted outcomes in 2020 and 2022.
- Need to ensure that our SEND service is fit for purpose, for young people, for parents, for partners. Must place the young person at the centre of our support and ensure their education and support is fit for purpose. Must also provide value for money and allow the County to live within its means.
- Safety Valve Deal in 2023 provided a significant financial settlement to address the financial deficit, but subject to stringent financial targets and performance requirements.
- Simultaneously, expectation from Department for Education that we will address long term issues around appraisal rates of plans, service provision, communication, and wider practice. Can't slow number of plans.
- Devon area partnership was inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in December 2018 and were required to produce a Written Statement of Action to address four areas of significant weakness. In May 2022, the local area was revisited by Ofsted/CQC who concluded that NO progress had been made. Next inspection due.



SEND Transformation – Current Position

- Safety Valve Agreement and establishment of the SEND Transformation Programme reset our position in 2023, with a focus on achieving a tight financial position alongside improving practice.
- Two elements often indivisible (better practice delivers savings).
- Safety Valve requires year on year reduction in expenditure trajectory to hit deficit targets / triggers for capital lump sum. Coupled with tight DfE improvement /performance targets around plans, lead times and outcomes.
- In 2024/25, target of £15.4m of spending reductions required against previous trajectory. Ramps up in future years as targets are cumulative.
- SEND Transformation Programme to achieve savings and improve practice established and delivering around 6 core strands

SEND Transformation Programme

- **Inclusion and Early Help (£2.8m)*** – Strengthening the targeted support to those with SEND and the seeking to intervene earlier to support decision making and opportunities.
- **Preparation for Adulthood (£3.6m)** – Working with those approaching and over 16 as they move into adulthood, with a focus on ensuring they are able to access the right educational offer for them and move towards employment and independent living.
- **Sufficiency (£4.7m)** – Ensuring that we have the right educational places in the right places with the right kind support, working with our mainstream schools, special schools and independent providers.
- **Financial Management and Placements (£4.1m)** – Ensuring our systems and data is fit for purpose, and that we fully understand our cohort, the finances linked to them and are able to make more informed decisions.
- **Multi Agency Pathways / Health (£0m)** – Working with partner services to create a seamless and cost-effective offer for our young people and their families, with a focus on making key services more effective.
- **Inclusion and Learning Redesign (£0m)** – Review and renewal of teams in Education and SEND into a new structure, better focused on correct practice, joint working and improved process.

** Figure indicates the in-year saving required in 24/25 from the Safety Valve Programme*

Pressures and Challenges

- Total overspend at present of £14.7m against the DSG compared to forecast. Safety valve projects currently forecast to deliver £11m of the £15.4m in cost reductions required in 2024. Cannot slip on either, so need for action.
- Significant slippage due to 4 issues at present:
 - **Demand** – National demand for plans currently at a significantly elevated level, with Devon having seen a post COVID jump in figures. Whilst expected to smooth in later years, currently seeing a 10-15% increase against trend.
 - **Clearing of our Backlog** – DfE’s improvement plan for SEND required the Council to deal with backlog of plans over 16 weeks. Authority has made good progress on this, but it is consequentially driving up costs as new plans are accepted. Roughly £5.5m extra cost in year.
 - **Inflation** – Average cost of individual placements in year has risen by £666 per plan across the cohort, despite significant management action to reduce pressure with a downstream impact for the Budget.
 - **Slippage by DfE and the Authority on Safety Valve Projects** – Projects around creation of new places in special schools and reforms to placement costs have been slow to deliver in year 1 of the safety valve. Whilst these will catch up in year 2 and beyond, does leave a gap.
- Demand and additional workload of clearing backlog / addressing additional cases also making it difficult for SEND leads and team leaders to find time to deliver wider transformation objectives alongside days jobs. Has a potential impact on future saving requirement.

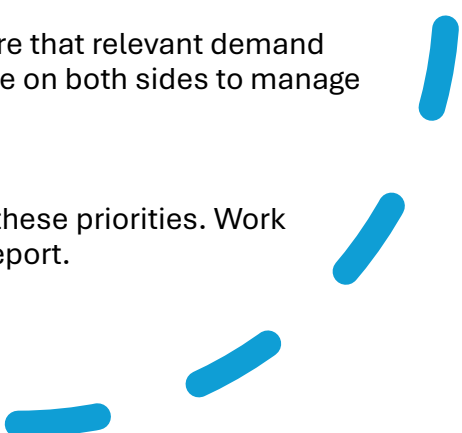
SEND Transformation – Why is become a Corporate Priority?

- Recent work on directorate level budgets has often focused on smaller savings and compromises between and within teams. Difficult decisions around individual teams.
- SEND Budget last year was around £300m in total, with daily decisions of around £300,000 on average.
- On Tuesday, a single placement decision on two young people saved £140,000 for the authority, a fairly normal day in SEND. Equivalent to:
 - One fully funded hourly bus route in Exeter;
 - The annual cost of an employment hub in one of our market towns, fully staffed; or
 - 2.5 public health nurses or members of the legal service;
- Daily savings made from activity in the service often larger than whole year savings for other directorates.
- As described in the Month 6 Budget report, wider risk for the Authority if we aren't able to get relevant cost under control. We have committed to Government that we will.

Primary Objective / Emerging Plan of Action

- Need to address **in year deficit** and ensure that trajectory of Safety Valve is hit / agree mitigative action with DfE.
- Need to also **ensure wider transformation programme / practice is delivered** to meet long term financial and performance / operational challenges
- In year options of mitigating around £4.7m identified, through securing additional AP solutions, health clawback, review of early years packages, changes in invoicing approaches from Jan.
- Also discussing with DfE the potential to reprofile part of year one to reflect the change in circumstance / delays around projects. Will require us to ensure future years provide the relevant catch up.
- **All solutions however predicated on freeing up staffing** to take forward / require additional resources.
- **Not a part time role.** Working on SEND a full-time job, with a need for a significant time commitment.

Priorities for Additional Support

- Five areas of additional priority identified across the over the last month requiring additional support and staff resource. Seeking to accelerate progress on SEND:
 - **Financial / Process Management** – Ensuring that financial and tracking systems are fit for purpose and providing accurate and timely payment and invoicing information around our young people. Need to ensure overpayments and other administrative issues are addressed.
 - **Governance** – Review of SEND Transformation Programme Governance, resetting and renewing boards and operational project leads to ensure improved accountability and assurance around the safety valve and wider SEND service transformation.
 - **Education Redesign** – Accelerating progress on the education redesign to ensure that suitable leadership and operational capacity is in place and aligned with our spatial and operational needs.
 - **Engagement and Places with Schools** – Enhanced capacity to engage with our schools and wider SEND providers around management of placements, enhancing provision and seeking to improve our shared approach to SEND needs.
 - **Engagement with Health Partners** – Working with health to ensure that relevant demand and costs are managed equitable, and suitable capacity is in place on both sides to manage Devon’s SEND needs.
 - Currently seeking to redeploy around 20 staff to support and assist with these priorities. Work already ongoing around finance and system, following the SEND Audit Report.
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Next Steps

SEND programme is looking to significantly accelerate current progress over the next couple of months. Intent is to close as much of the gap this year as practicable. and prepare for additional savings for next year and beyond.

In support of this, seeking to deploy additional resources into target areas and projects to accelerate progress over next few weeks. Not about undermining other areas of work, but recognising that SEND has to be a priority at present.

Discussions ongoing with DfE around how they wish to manage slippage. Other areas facing similar challenges, so Devon is not unique, but likely we will have to ask for some reprofiling of the Safety Valve given the gap involved.

Need to ensure that the loss of pace and demand challenge is addressed. Year 1 challenges around the pace of mobilization and unforeseen challenges not unusual, but can't become routine.