

Slough Borough Council

Safety Value Intervention Programme/High Needs Budget Deficit Recovery Plan

15 September 2023: Summary Update Report

Date Submitted	15 Sept 2023
Signed off by Director of Children’s Services	
Signed off by S151 Officer	

Summary:

Slough Borough Council is on track to meet the deficit control and reduction targets set out in its Safety Valve Agreement.

The provisional outturn position for 2022-23 is an overspend on all DSG blocks of £0.097m with an overspend on the High Needs DSG Block of £0.407m. This contrasts with a forecast overspend on all DSG Blocks at quarter 3 of 2022-23 of £1.638m.

2023-24 Period 5 Budget Management report for High Needs DSG has total forecast spend of £22.3m against a budget of £25.1m. The SEND Team is currently working on a backlog of 290 EHCP’s which could see additional forecast spending of £2.6m in high needs top-up funding. This would give an overall projected spend of £24.9m, and an estimated underspend of 0.2m in 2023-24.

Overall, in 2023-24 the four DSG blocks are projected an underspend of £0.6m (£0.3m in schools block, £0.2m in high needs block and £0.1m in the early years block).

More work is being undertaken to refine our modelling forecasts and a more accurate estimate of the final outturn for 2023-24 will be available in the December 2023 update report.

On August 4th this year, the Secretary of State for Education issued a Statutory Direction to SBC in relation to its SEND services. This was due to a lack of progress made to address the seven areas of weakness identified in the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection report from October 2021. The evidence regarding lack of progress was obvious at the DFE Monitoring Visit that took place at the end of February this year and from reports from the Department for Education (DFE) appointed Commissioner and SEND Adviser.

The DFE stated that they are aware that there has been “considerable change in senior leadership at SBC” in recent months and that the new team are “determined and motivated to bring positive change”. Nevertheless, the local authority fully accepts the Statutory Direction and agrees that it was clear that the area had failed to make sufficient progress against the areas of significant weaknesses at the time of the DFE visit.

As a result, the remit of the Children’s Services Commissioner, Paul Moffatt, will be extended

to include SBC SEND functions.

Department for Education (DFE) Monitoring Visit July 2023

The feedback from the DFE officials attending the latest monitoring visit acknowledged the demanding work that has been put into improving SEND 0-25 services in Slough since the start of March. The SEND Partnership Board new project reporting and data dashboard now provides a good understanding of the quality of the services being provided. Whilst the improvements made were too recent to have made a significant difference to the quality of SEND 0-25 service, the monitoring evidence showed early signs of improvement.

Several key actions that had been taken were shared with the DFE officials including the establishment of a Strategic Inclusion Partnership Board providing strategic oversight, a data dashboard measuring performance against agreed KPIs and a live cases dashboard to support decision making for individual pupils.

Shortly after the visit, the latest monthly reporting to the DFE included the fact that 28 EHC plans had been finalised in July. This is the most in one month since the inspection and included 5 that had been completed within statutory timescales which is again the best performance since 2021. The key factors in this change of performance are the changes to the team and the sourcing of more locum educational psychologists to complete assessments. Although this is very encouraging and evidences the improvement in the service, it is not yet at the level of the service in 2020 when around 30-35 plans were completed each month. Given that some of the teams are still inexperienced, new officers are now in place and that systems are still being improved, it is hoped that this level will be achieved (and potentially surpassed) in the new term and the team are determined to maintain this standard moving forwards.

Agreement Condition 1	Assurance Level		
Managing demand for Education Health Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) and Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs)	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	GREEN	RAG
<p>Progress Update:</p> <p><u>Action taken to date.</u></p> <p><u>The following actions have been taken forward:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ the SEND Statutory team has been developed both in terms of staffing and processes to ensure that the Code of Practice is effectively and efficiently followed. A Head of SEND 0-25, two experienced managers, a Resolutions Officer and a Commissioning Transformation consultant have been recruited. A new 			

Principal Educational Psychologist and Team Manager for Inclusion have also been appointed alongside additional locum EPs (Educational Psychology). The new Send 0-25 Leadership Team have already updated SEND processes and completed a review of all current cases to identify possible quick resolutions. All education settings /provisions now have a dedicated SEND Link Officer to improve communication and working together.

- the Chair of SEND Panel since April 2021 has ensured robust adherence to terms of reference and SEND Code of Practice (2015) ensuring transparency of decision-making and all decisions have been appropriately recorded and tracked.
- the membership of SEND Panel has widened to include regular contributions from head teachers and other agencies such as Adult Social Care and regular Health attendance.
- the SEND Commissioner (permanent post) has attended the Panel since May 2021, and this has enabled rigour and consistency in the approach to commissioning across cases and particularly for any complex cases.
- the triage process introduced in June 2021 continues to add a layer of quality assurance which ensures that all cases presented include the relevant and available evidence for the SEND Panel to make their decisions.
- proposals were shared with the Schools Forum in November 2021 to mitigate immediate risk of banding inflation at phase transfer. These proposals ensured that, where a child or young person's CYP (Children and Young People) needs were being met under the previous banding system, this banding would be maintained at phase transfer, rather than moving to the closest matrix banding, which would typically have incurred an increase of at least £1000 per EHCP (Education Health Care Plans). These were applied to all EHCPs amended as part of the September 2022 and September 2023 phase transfer process (i.e., from February 2022 onwards).
- the following assumptions have been applied to phase transfers from 2021-2202 and 2023 where appropriate to the need of the individual CYP:
 - most pupils leaving PVI's will transfer to mainstream primaries
 - most pupils leaving mainstream primaries will transfer to mainstream secondaries with same level of funding
 - most pupils with a primary RB (Resource Bases) place will transfer to mainstream secondary or mainstream secondary RB provision
 - most pupils in primary SEN (Special Educational Needs) units will transfer to maintained/academy special school
 - most pupils leaving mainstream secondaries will transfer to a local mainstream college placement
 - most pupils leaving special school will transfer to a higher cost college placement (i.e., not an ISP)

Impact to date

There has been considerable positive impact from the above actions:

- analysis of new assessments in the first 6 months of 2022-23, compared to the same period the previous year, shows that these have increased by 2.9% year-on-year in Slough. This is consistent with the overall prediction for a 3% rise in plans this year. This has spiked slightly in the last few weeks of the Summer

Term 2023 but has since reduced and we continue to be monitored closely from week to week.

- the average cost of a newly issued plan has decreased from £11,086 in July-Sept 2020 to £8,478 in July-Sept 2022; this exceeds the savings figures set out in CR4 of the Management Plan.
- the proportion of newly issued plans designated mainstream as type had increased from 81% to 92% and settled at +/- 90% with some fluctuation at times e.g., mover ins and phase transfers.

Ensuring Sustainability of Changes and Future Plans

The processes at the SEND Panel need to remain fully embedded to ensure ongoing rigour and transparency. Focus needs to remain on quality and outcomes for CYP with SEND, while also having regard for the financial envelope. particular focus will remain the timeliness of issuing of final plans as the system continues to become more robust.

More detailed proposals on updating the banding matrix will go to Schools Forum in March 2024. This will ensure that:

- the existing models used by statistical neighbours and other South-East authorities are fully considered and benchmarked against Slough.
- descriptors are reviewed to ensure that decisions regarding banding accurately reflects the provision that the LA (Local Authority) must fund through top-up in line with each EHCP.
- any EHCPs assimilated from previous system can be funded at a level which reflects provision required without arbitrary inflation due to a lack of 'like-for-like' banding increment.
- proposals are fully modelled both operationally and financially to ensure that needs are met while keeping regard to sustainability and the existing financial envelope.

Agreement Condition 2	Assurance Level		
Independent Non-Maintained Special School (INMSS)	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	NEEDS REVIEW	RAG

Progress Update:

Action taken to date.

The following actions have been taken forward:

- rigorous panel processes ensure and assure that only CYP whose needs cannot be met at local Maintained Provisions are being placed in INMSS.
- consultation processes have been strengthened and INMSS schools are only being consulted with where appropriate
- commissioning is being better informed and quality, appropriateness and value for money are the key considerations. Spend to save options must be produced on any expenditure or suggestion of an out of area OOA (Out of Area) placement.

- Slough Schools Placing Strategy and the Place Planning Board has been refreshed with a clearer focus on SEND 0-25 including Alternative Provision and Post 16 sufficiency.
- work is underway on a joint commissioning strategy with a Commissioning and Transformation consultant appointed to lead on this work. Initial scoping meetings have taken place to identify opportunities for wider delivery with Arbour Vale School. Capacity analysis of current SRP (Specialist Resource Provision) provision has been conducted and detailed SLAs agreed for each setting will be issued.
- all CYP attending Independent Non-Maintained Providers have been identified and at Annual Review all these cases are being audited to ensure this is the most appropriate placement to meet need. NASS type contracts have been renewed and IPA have been scrutinised and updated.
- at key transitions consideration is given to whether these placements are still the most appropriate placement for the CYP. A PfA {Preparing for Adulthood} Lead officer has been appointed to assure annual reviews consider ceasing EHCPs as appropriate. PfA will now be starting before NCY 9.
- all INMSS Providers have/are being met by the Group Manager for Inclusion and SEND Commissioner to review the cost of placements and to renegotiate costings if appropriate.
- officers have compared the data against bench marking exercise which have occurred with other Southeast authorities, and we now know joint commissioning opportunities are likely to be limited across the Southeast as schools who are used frequently by other authorities are not ones Slough use.

Impact to date

Ensuring Sustainability of Changes and Future Plans

It is important to reiterate that without continued scrutiny thorough SEND Panel process and rigour of decision making these numbers could very easily increase so panel processes are being further developed and there is now health (SLT) and social care representation:

- the ongoing work with East Berkshire needs to develop to ensure more effective joint commissioning to better meet the “East Berks’ area” needs and to thus have more cost-effective placements and better joined up working and decision making. The local commissioning working is focussing on high-cost providers and how we can more effectively commission places and manage the market. There is a development of a new Joint Commissioned contract with RBWM, Bracknell Forest BC and Slough for a Joint Therapies contract with Frimley ICB. Short term Contracts have been issued until March 2025 whilst the unique Joint Commission is agreed.
- a joint working party of the three LAs (local authorities) has been formed and meets the SEND Commissioner ensuring that we are securing agreement with Providers around costings and uplifts, also to ensure effective contract management.
- benchmarking data from across the Southeast demonstrates that our numbers are below those of our similar local authorities and we need to continue to ensure wherever possible not to use the INMSS sector for non-complex children. We have stopped an extremely expensive OoA placement of one pupil

<p>by a spend to save option using our own Special school. This has ‘saved’ a projected £670K over the next 10 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ when parents express a preference, SEND officers now work with them around the graduated response and most appropriate local setting to meet need. Highlighting Ofsted outcomes of some local INMSS and Section 41 status so parents have a full understanding all the information to make an informed choice. 			
Agreement Condition 3		Assurance Level	
Post-16	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	GOOD	RAG
<p>Progress Update:</p> <p><u>Action taken to date.</u></p> <p><u>The following actions have been taken forward:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ data has been audited and all post-16 placements identified with costs. ➤ a new operational policy for ceasing EHC plans and ensuring that young adults receive the right support moving forward has been agreed to ensure consistency and efficiency. ➤ any EHCPs which may need to cease have reviews and actions underway to send cease to maintain letters. ➤ decisions at SEND Panel are ensuring that YP’s placements are agreed after taking into consideration their aspirations but also ensuring quality of placements and value for money. ➤ decisions to continue to fund young people for the same courses in different institutions are being challenged and only agreed if it can be demonstrated that a key outcome is still to be achieved. ➤ individual placement costings are being scrutinised and where necessary being challenged. ➤ all placements now have a contract and an Individual Partnership Agreement (IPA) in place. ➤ all Year 14 placements are being scrutinised to ensure that there is an exceptional reason for why they need to stay in a school placement. transition plans at Years 9, 11 and 13 are being put in place to ensure that the assumption of Year 14 places in school are no longer the norm. ➤ all colleges have been met with to discuss both the LA and the settings statutory duties toward YP with EHC plans. These meetings are also allowing discussions around the importance of progression in courses and the need to have clear transition plans to leave college. ➤ more effective commissioning arrangements are being discussed with other Southeast LAs. 			

- more effective commissioning arrangements are being discussed with colleges and options to commission bespoke courses for Slough CYP are being investigated and costed
- work is underway with SEND Officers and Enhance EHC plan writers to ensure consistent quality of Post 16 Plans particularly around the clarity of provision in Section F. To ensure that the range of college providers can deliver with confidence and all costings then can specifically reflect the updated Plan.

Impact to date

There has been considerable positive impact from the above actions:

- where appropriate plans have been ceased and/or lower cost local alternative placements have been identified. This has enabled predicted cost reductions for 2021-22 and 2022-23 to be met in full.

Ensuring Sustainability of Changes and Future Plans

- a transition group is being developed which will be chaired by the AD (Associate Director) of Adults' Services and will work with all stakeholders including young people to ensure that clear pathways are in place to enable a smooth transition into other services if appropriate.
- it is important to reiterate that without continued thorough SEND Panel processes and rigour of decision making these numbers could very easily increase exponentially.
- working with Orchard Hill college (Specialist) and BCA (Berkshire College Agricultural) and Langley College, part of the Windsor Forest Group {WFG} to develop proposals around a specific provision to meet the needs of young people with social communication difficulties who have struggled to engage with the school curriculum in Key Stages 4 and 5. This has been identified as a gap in the Local Offer and for some of these youngsters they have had their needs met in PRU (Pupil Referral Unit) Provision which has not always been successful in ensuring their future inclusion in mainstream colleges.
- a more detailed proposal of how this will look will be developed after further meetings. Both colleges are keen to engage with Slough and there may be a capital bid related to this scheme.
- further development work with the WFG to look at development of the foundation courses and increase in placements to meet more YP's needs locally is being planned. Further development round the BCA/Langley College SEND Offer.

Agreement Condition 4	Assurance Level		
Additional Resource Provisions (ARPs)	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	GOOD	RAG

Progress Update:

Action taken to date.

The following actions have been taken forward:

- increased scrutiny of which CYP are placed in Slough ARPs, to ensure that only CYP with an ARP (Additional Resource Provision) identified in their EHC plan are filling a commissioned place.
- two primary ARPs which are currently functioning as SEN Units have consulted to ensure that this status can be reflected in their SLA with Slough to ensure that CYP are placed appropriately.
- one small primary ARP (8 commissioned places) closed in July 2022 following a consultation with stakeholders, due to difficulty in sustaining delivery to the small number of complex CYP for which it had ARP capacity. New placements were required for September 2022 where required (this was of negligible impact overall as the number of CYP requiring alternative placement totalled 5)
- one ARP is to reduce from 60 by a decrease in 10-20 places over the next 2-3 years. This is as result of the proportion of statutory SEND CYP in relation to mainstream Published Admission Number (PAN) becoming unsustainable, particularly as the school’s PAN is due to decrease as part of Slough’s Place Planning Strategy.
- agreement made with our all-through special school to ensure that all our commissioned places are focused on years 0 to 13. Commissioning of Nursery and Year 14 exception placements will occur separately to maximise placements for CYP aged 4 to 18 years and in line with the High Needs Block Guidance.
- increase in SEND EHC plan commissioned placements for September 2022 onwards within our secondary special school.
- SLAs have been re-drafted and scrutinised with legal advisors and sent to settings for consultation feedback
- The process of consulting with ARPs both when issuing new EHC plans and for phase transfers, has been made more robust to ensure full compliance with the SEND Code of Practice (2015)

Ensuring Sustainability of Changes and Future Plans

- regular contract monitoring meetings, to monitor new SLAs
- newly embedded processes must be maintained to ensure compliance
- contract monitoring and data monitoring need to be considered when looking at future place planning within the SEND sector. Resilience built into system to ensure that additional places can be commissioned in our ARPs and special schools to address population changes in a timely manner (see Risk and Resilience section).

Agreement Condition 5	Assurance Level		
Alternative Education Provision	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023

	N/A	GOOD	RAG
<p>Progress Update:</p> <p><u>Action taken to date.</u></p> <p>The following actions have been taken forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ the LA has reviewed benchmarking data from different authorities all who have differing models. Most provide the minimum statutory provision (6th day following a permanent exclusion) and some preventative places where schools either fund most of the place or fund top up above the £10,000 base funding. The numbers for these preventative places are significantly lower than those provided by Slough. ➤ unusually, Slough has not got a strong alternative education offer within a broader market, unlike some of the other authorities in the South-East, and this appears to be due mainly to the fact that the LA has fully funded full time AP (Alternative Provision) places at Haybrook School and Littledown School so schools have not needed to look elsewhere to purchase or fund their AP Provision. The model of AP provided in Slough fails to have regard for the DfE (Department for Education) definition of AP with most costs being borne by the LA as opposed to Schools. ➤ the existing model is not sustainable and cost reductions have been put forward around a more manageable costing to reflect the LA’s Statutory Responsibilities around Permanent Exclusions. Cost Reductions have been proposed over a three-year period to mitigate impact and allow the schools to develop other models of delivery with schools. ➤ discussions have started with both existing AP Providers. This area requires significant systemic change. <p><u>Impact to date</u></p> <p>There has been considerable positive impact from the above actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Actions implemented to reduce commissioned numbers have achieved a cost reduction of £538k for the year 2022-23, and projected savings for the project overall are set out in Table 3 below. <p><u>Ensuring Sustainability of Changes and Future Plans</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ AP costs in Slough are likely to remain disproportionately high compared to our statistical neighbours unless there is a strong, clear strategy which highlights Academies and Maintained Schools’ statutory responsibilities toward vulnerable CYP. ➤ The development of a stronger market for AP Providers from different sectors would allow for a better range of vocational options for children, young people and their families and would introduce an element of competition to the market 			

for schools and the LA

- Current proposals to reduce LA-commissioned places over the next 3 years will deliver the following savings:

Risk 1	Assurance Level		
Financial	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	Good	RAG
<p>High Needs budget could continue to experience escalating cost pressures due to a continued increase in demand for EHCPs and top up funding and complexity of need which can only be met in the independent sector. Cost Reductions are not as high as estimated, increase demand leading to increase commissioning of places, increased costs linked to addressing increase legal challenge.</p>			
<p>Progress update:</p> <p>There is pressure both in terms of demand for EHC plans and existing settings requesting larger than usual cost of living inflationary increases. The Council has agreed a maximum uplift policy which we have been able to meet so far.</p> <p>We are currently managing the demand and the wider delivery project with Arbour Vale School and other settings is designed to meet future demand without increasing the use of INMSS settings.</p> <p>However, the joint commissioning / SEND Place Planning will continue to monitor this closely to ensure that this continues to be managed effectively in the future.</p>			
Risk 2	Assurance Level		
Service Delivery	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	Good	RAG
<p>Challenges around sufficiency of the market. Turnover of staff impacting on workforce capacity and skill set.</p>			
<p>Progress update:</p> <p>As above, joint commissioning and wider delivery programmes will ensure that any sufficiency issues are addressed. New members of the SEND Statutory team have brought greater experience, knowledge, and examples of best practice. New operational</p>			

<p>processes and guidance, alongside a programme of training, ensure that all officers are empowered and will encourage greater retention of staff. As a result, the high turnover of staff did not continue in the summer term 2023.</p>			
Risk 3	Assurance Level		
Reputational	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	Good	RAG
<p>Increase in Corporate complaints, dissatisfaction among stake holders, negative publicity.</p>			
<p>Progress update:</p> <p>The level of complaints has remained high until recently. In the last few weeks, a new complaints policy and next steps planning approach has resolved several concerns. The service is also receiving regular compliments from service users.</p> <p>The service continues to work closely with Special Voices, our Parent Carer Forum, including regularly regular surveys. This means that we will track service user satisfaction and dissatisfaction without simply relying on complaints. Similarly link officers for all schools can better understand concerns and measure improvement by talking to SENCOs and other education leaders.</p> <p>Another key piece of work moving forward will be better understanding of the lived experiences of our children and young people with SEND.</p>			
Risk 4	Assurance Level		
Legal/Regulatory	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	Watch	RAG
<p>Increased risks of legal challenge by way of appeal and judicial review and increased risk of complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.</p>			
<p>Progress update:</p> <p>Recent tribunal decisions have been decided in favour of the Council and we are not seeing the elevated level of appeals that other LAs are experiencing. We have seen several complaints to the LGSCO (Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman) but have been able to resolve most of these through mediation to avoid judgements that could have financial and reputational implications. This will need to be monitored closely and so we have RAG rated this as Amber.</p>			

Risk 5	Assurance Level		
Economic	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	Good	RAG
Unanticipated changes in demographics and cost of living/ inflationary pressures. Risks to jobs and workforce if cost reductions are made to quickly and too soon.			
<p>Progress update:</p> <p>There is no evidence of issues around the speed of cost reductions. The number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children with complex needs has been identified as a potential risk but is not yet affecting our financial progress.</p>			
Mitigation 1	Assurance Level		
Alternative Education Provision	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	Good	RAG
<p>There is significant stake holder scrutiny around this project (particularly head teachers.) There is a three-year Plan in place and the project is in Year 1 now; savings have already been achieved within timescale. Mitigations in place are a Project Group led by the SEND Commissioner and this group will run for the next three years. This will ensure any issues and areas of concern are addressed. New ways of working are being developed which moves the emphasis on commissioning AP Provision to the school rather than Stake Holders viewing the Local Authority as the sole Commissioner. The LA will continue to meet its Statutory duty for six-day provision for permanently children and some preventative placements allocated via a multi-agency panel.</p>			
<p>Progress update:</p> <p>A new working party looking at exclusions and AP provision has been formed to ensure that school leaders views and daily experiences are considered in our Council policies and practice. There is a growing recognition that non statutory, preventative AP placements should not be funded by the High Needs Block unless there is a proven spend-to-save model.</p>			
Mitigation 2	Assurance Level		

Agenda Item 9

Post 16 Provision	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	RAG	Good	RAG
<p>The main risk within the Post 16 Sector at present is the merger of BCA College to become a part of the Windsor Forest Group. This means that Slough is now the host Authority and commissions places across the Group. There have been several meetings to ensure that Slough commission the correct number of places for the group across the local area. Further meetings are occurring with all Berks and Bucks LAs to ensure we can work together to have more effective place planning. It has been identified that ongoing work is required at phase transfer for Years' 9, 11 and 13/14 to ensure that young people's pathways are appropriate for achieving their preparation for adulthood (PfA) outcomes; mitigations include the bolstering of SEND team staff in a dedicated post-14 team, to focus on PfA and effective phase transfer processes. Potential capital projects are also being explored to increase of range of placements and accessible pathways.</p>			
<p>Progress update:</p> <p>A new PfA approach is being designed and post 16 places have a high priority in our overall sufficiency and place planning work. Sufficiency of places has not been a significant issue at the start of the new academic year.</p>			
Mitigation 3	Assurance Level		
Managing demand (EHCNAs/EHCPs)	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	RAG	Good	RAG
<p>Mitigations here are inbuilt and based on rigorous process and decision-making, which is already seeing an impact. In addition, there is potential for capital projects to support commissioning of places as population fluctuates (this is anticipated and planned for), and these are being incorporated into the current draft of the Council's Place Planning Strategy (draft to be scrutinised at next Cabinet meeting).</p>			
<p>Progress update:</p> <p>The capital programme is being agreed by Cabinet and further details will be shared in the next quarter monitoring paper.</p>			
Mitigation 4	Assurance Level		
Inflation	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	Good	RAG
<p>The High Needs block funds pupil placements in schools and further education</p>			

establishments, and this represents 81.25% of total forecast expenditure. This expenditure is split between base funding of £10,000 per pupil and top-up funding. The base funding has been flat for the last couple of years and has not attracted any inflationary increases. Top-up funding in Slough BC represents some of the highest payments to providers than anywhere else within England. One of our key cost reductions is focused around reducing top-up funding to all providers, therefore, it would not be appropriate to add inflationary increases to funding we want to reduce. Expenditure on the remaining 18.75% of High Needs expenditure should attract inflationary increases. We are forecasting 4% inflation in 2023-24 and 2% in subsequent years

Progress update:

SBC is carefully managing requests for inflationary increases from 3rd party providers to keep inflationary increases within our forecasts. This is being off-set by increased in-borough provision by 3.4% in line DFE funding guidance.

Resilience	Assurance Level		
	16 June 2023	15 Sept 2023	15 Dec 2023
	N/A	Good	RAG

The projects to reduce costs within the current plan have been carefully considered and interrogated to ensure sustainability, minimal impact on service delivery wherever possible, and best potential outcome for value and managing costs. The pace and amount have been planned to ensure stability of the workforce and continuity for stakeholders – any acceleration would need to treat with caution, due to the risk of destabilising the plan as a whole; many of the projects involve mechanisms that interlink and interact upon one another.

To develop our resilience there is capacity within the plan for a centrally retained number of places (up to 50), which can be allocated during the lifetime of the plan should demand increase beyond our planned projections. There are also aspects of the Council’s centrally retained budget, which fund non-statutory services and posts, which can be drawn upon should there be an unplanned momentous change in demand which needs to be addressed. This gives further assurance that we can meet cost reduction targets, though use of this mechanism may impact wider service delivery within the People (Children’s) directorate.

All cost reduction projects within the plan have detailed, year-on-year actions and outcomes outlined; this ensures that any staff new to the organisation are clear on project progress and next steps. There are succession plans in place for key roles, including the roles of commissioning and finance as well excellent work being carried out on recording procedures, systems, and processes. SEND, commissioning and finance have worked collaboratively in the formulation of this plan and will continue to do so throughout its implementation. The council has also committed addition general funding to permanent posts within the SEND team to support implementation.

Progress update:

The main area for focus moving forward will be the backlog cases and managing the national increase in demand for EHC plans and special school places. However, as the rest of this report evidence, whilst we remain cautious, the current position suggests that the resilience of the plan is not a concern and the improving quality of the SEND Statutory team is a key factor in this.