

# West Berkshire Council SEND Strategy - Draft 2023-2028



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## Foreword from the West Berkshire SEND Partnership Board

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There is no single, shared experience for children with SEND. Children with SEND come from a variety of backgrounds, have a huge range of different needs and require different types and kinds of provision to maximise their potential. In West Berkshire, the majority of families are able to access the support they need from a local spectrum of mainstream and specialist services.

However, we know that it is difficult for some families to access the early identification, universal or specialist help their children need to thrive. This can be true for children in their early years; for young people transitioning to adulthood; for families seeking help from their mainstream school or those in need of a specialist school place; for children with anxiety or mental health problems, and for families seeking short breaks or respite for their children.

West Berkshire's five year SEND Strategy 2018 – 2023 has seen good progress made towards a vision of a system where children and families are able to access the right support at the right time in order to become happy and resilient adults, but there is still more to do. Whilst the local and national context for SEND has changed considerably since 2018, our vision for change remains mostly the same.

We believe that this five year strategy, delivered alongside a national programme of reform, will enable us to achieve necessary changes in our system. Children with SEND in West Berkshire deserve the right support, adjustments and interventions, at the right time, to thrive in childhood and to prepare well for adulthood.

# Executive Summary

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Much has changed since the launch of West Berkshire's first SEND Strategy in 2018. There have been significant improvements in local services, but new and persistent challenges need to be addressed. To achieve this ambition, we have developed a strategy programme in partnership with local stakeholders and families, which addresses six strategic priorities.

- The Early Years
- The Universal Offer
- Increasing Local Specialist Provision
- Pathways to Adulthood
- Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and Young People's Mental Health
- Short Breaks and Respite

West Berkshire's SEND Strategy will be delivered in partnership by the Council, the Integrated Care Board, health providers, schools and other services. We will implement this strategy in co-production with the local Parent Carer Forum and Youth Forum; establishing a charter with these groups to agree a shared approach towards co-production. Our strategy delivery will be

focused on ensuring services provide help early and as close as possible to the places in which families live. All projects will be delivered in a trauma informed and person-centred way; involving all relevant agencies and services.

This strategy programme will be delivered by strategy implementation groups with representation from health, social care, educational settings, the voluntary sector and families themselves. Cross-agency accountability and leadership will be provided to the whole strategy by the SEND Strategic Partnership Board. This document establishes a strong framework for agencies to work together to deliver sustainable change for children with SEND in West Berkshire.

## Introduction

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Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) often share the same ambitions as their peers. In West Berkshire, we know that our children with SEND want to have fun with their friends, learn in a supportive and caring environment, pursue interests, develop independence and ultimately, grow up to become adults with fulfilling lives. With appropriate differentiation, adjustments, care and health interventions, many of our children are able to realise these aspirations. We want to make sure that all of our children with SEND receive the support they need in order to thrive and achieve their potential.

In 2018, West Berkshire Council created a five year SEND Strategy in partnership with

families and other stakeholders. This strategy established the shared vision of a system where children and families were able to access the right support at the right time. Significant progress has been made towards this aim. New educational settings have been built, specialist teams have been created and expanded, a new model of therapeutic practice has been introduced and clear standards for SEN provision in schools have been set; but enduring challenges still remain.

The COVID 19 pandemic has made life more difficult for vulnerable children and families, entrenching inequalities between those who already do well and those who need support to flourish. The number of children issued with



an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has continued to rise, driving up the demand for specialist educational placements. Further work is needed to help mainstream and early years providers identify and support SEND early, and effectively. The period after the pandemic has seen the number of children identified as Emotionally Based School Avoidant (EBSA) and Electively Home Educated (EHE) surge, placing new demands on schools and the local authority. Transition to adulthood remains an area of difficulty for some young people, despite an increasing focus on this area by policy makers.

Many other local areas are experiencing these challenges too. In recognition of the national need to “deliver a more dignified experience for children and young people with SEND”, the Department for Education published its SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan in March 2023. This implementation plan proposed the most

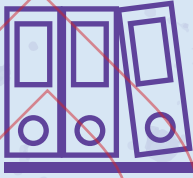
significant reforms to the SEND system in a generation, promising national standards of provision across Education, Social Care and Health; statutory local SEND partnerships, new qualifications, increased training, a consistent national funding system for SEND and greater accountability.

Changes are also taking place in other parts of the system which support children with SEND. Taken together, these reforms represent an opportunity to work together across local agencies to implement lasting change. A West Berkshire Early Years Strategy has been developed in conjunction with this SEND Strategy to address the overlapping concerns of both sectors. Within Health, local assessment pathways for neurodiversity have seen new investment and reorganisation, whilst local Clinical Commissioning Groups have migrated to Integrated Care Boards. National system reform to the Adult Social Care sector remains a political priority, with change likely within the next few years. This strategy will capitalise on these reforms.

Throughout its development, our strategy has been informed by feedback from families canvassed from coffee meets, stay and plays and SEND advice sessions. Our SEND Youth Survey, designed to capture the perspectives of young people, was developed in partnership with representatives of local special schools, the Parent Carer Forum and Youth Forum, receiving 264 responses. This strategy's six priorities were confirmed by SEND Strategic Partnership Board, whilst our strategy programme was developed by seven, multi-agency working groups. Co-production with families, children and key partners will remain a core focus of our programme.

This strategy offers a blue print for a SEND system in West Berkshire in which children receive the help they need, when they need it. We believe that children with additional needs should receive the right support, adjustments and interventions, at the right time, to thrive in childhood and to prepare well for adulthood.

# SEND in West Berkshire



**3.3%** growth in West Berkshire's school population between 2017/18 and 2020/21.

This is more than the national school population (3%) but less than South East as a whole (4.2%).

**24.4%**

Overall rise in requests for EHCP assessment between 2018/19 and 2021/22.

Rise in assessment requests:

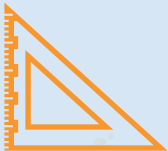
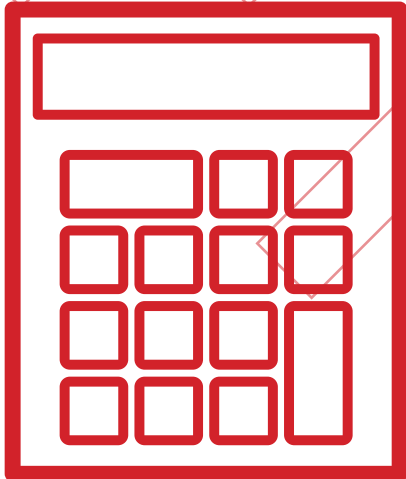
- Early Years - 73.1%
- Primary - 4%
- Secondary - 26%



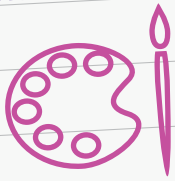
**£24,993,926**

Total spend by West Berkshire Council on children with SEND in 2022/23.

**62.1%** of children said their needs were met at least most of the time in their place of education (SEND Youth Survey 2023).

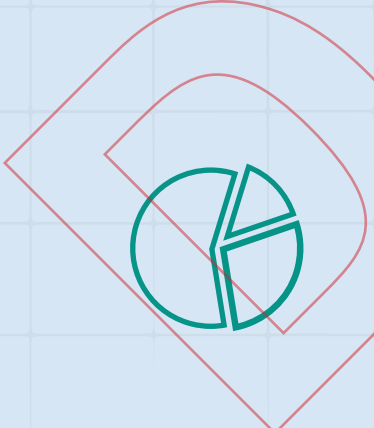


- **72.2%**
- increase in educational placements in independent, non-maintained, or free special schools between 2011 and 2021.



- **1,074** children with an EHCP in West Berkshire in 2021/22.
- An increase of **27.8%** since 2017/18.
- **162.3% rise** Social Emotional Mental Health Need identified as the primary need on their EHCP
- **30.3% rise** Autism identified as the primary need on their EHCP.

**351** children identified as Electively Home Educated in 2021/22. In 2018/19 this figure was 96.



- **65%** of parents and carers agreed or strongly agreed that their concerns about their child's SEND were listened to by their child's school (SEND Support Parent Survey 2022).



# Progress Since 2018

West Berkshire's current SEND Strategy was developed in 2018 with the aim of providing the "right support and opportunities at the right time" for children with SEND. This core aim was underpinned by five objectives and a multi-agency strategy programme. A number of significant projects have been completed since the strategy's inception, including newly established services and provision.

## Support early years settings and mainstream schools to improve inclusion and educational outcomes for children with SEND

- ✓ The Therapeutic Thinking strategy, a new approach to behaviour management in schools, was launched successfully, with the majority of settings participating in training and adopting the approach.
- ✓ Guidance establishing "ordinarily available" standards of SEND provision West Berkshire Schools was launched ("Provision for Children & Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in West Berkshire Schools"). A Training Directory, Autism Toolkit and Teacher's handbook were also published.
- ✓ The Early Years Toolkit was developed in partnership with local nurseries, Dingley's Promise, and internal teams at West Berkshire Council.
- ✓ Guidance was launched by West Berkshire Council to support schools to meet their duties under equalities legislation (such as accessibility planning).
- ✓ The Autism Advisory Service has been permanently expanded with additional staff.
- ✓ An EBSA Team and Forum has been created to support professionals working with children whose anxiety prevents them from attending school.
- ✓ Additional funding has been made available to schools which can be accessed to support children with SEND without an EHCP.

## Develop a continuum of local provision to meet the needs of children with SEND (including autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and social, emotional and mental, health difficulties (SEMH))

- ✓ The Castle @ Theale, a multi-million pound provision for secondary aged children with SEMH needs, has been launched. When full, this setting will provide educational places for 42 children with SEMH needs up to the age of 18.
- ✓ A new resourced unit for primary aged children with SEMH needs is under development at Kennet Valley School. This setting will open in September 2024 and will support 12 children when full.
- ✓ Additional key stage 2 and 3 places for children with SEMH and Autism were created at The Pod and Pod Plus, part of West Berkshire's I-College provision.

## Improve post 16, education, learning, employment and training

- ✓ Castle and Brookfields Schools, in partnership with other local organisations, developed and expanded their Supported Internship programmes. These provide pathways into employment for young people with SEND.
- ✓ Newbury College reviewed and relaunched its SEND courses, with greater emphasis on preparation for adulthood and employment.
- ✓ West Berkshire Council launched its own programme of work experience for EHCP holders from mainstream schools.
- ✓ A definition of work-related employment (including expected standards) was agreed and shared with local providers of post-16 placements.
- ✓ A community of practice group for mainstream careers leads, with a focus on provision for children with SEND, was created.



## Develop positive transitions for young people with SEND to enable them to prepare for adulthood

- ✓ A Transitions Team was established within Adult Social Care to support young people with complex needs as they transition into adulthood.
- ✓ All young people referred to the Transitions Team had agreed support packages in place and funding agreed in time for transition at age 18.
- ✓ Preparing for Adulthood guidance, setting out pathways of support for those moving into adulthood with SEND, was published.

## Enable children and young people with SEND to enjoy good physical and mental health and wellbeing

- ✓ The Mental Health Support Team was launched, providing short term interventions within partnering schools for children with mild to moderate mental health concerns.
- ✓ Assessment pathways for Autism and ADHD have been reorganised from Child, Adolescent, Mental Health Service into a new Neurodiversity Service. Online assessments are now offered and peer to peer support is available via the SHARON service for those awaiting assessment.
- ✓ A new Learning Disability CAMHS Service has been commissioned by the ICB and will be fully operational by 2024.
- ✓ A vision workshop was held to explore how West Berkshire could become trauma aware and offer trauma informed services.
- ✓ Regular information events have been held by the local Parent Carer Forum to promote the SEND Local Offer.
- ✓ Anxiety workshops for families have been offered by the Emotional Health Academy.





## Our Vision

### Reasons for Change

Despite improvements to local services since 2018, compelling reasons to change still remain.

- Children with SEND in the early years do not always receive the support they need, or are eligible for, as early as possible.
- There are greater numbers of children with SEND, including those with more complex needs, requiring support from mainstream schools and services, putting pressure on schools and services to deliver the support needed.
- The system is too reliant on access to EHCPs to deliver support and funding, meaning some children do not get support as quickly as they should.
- There are not enough local school places available for children with learning difficulties, SEMH, autism and acute anxiety.
- Unclear pathways and inconsistent opportunities for employment-related activity mean that some young people with SEND may still experience a difficult transition to adulthood.
- An increasing number of children with SEND have difficulty attending school due to anxiety. The number of children who are off-rolled by their families and educated at home is also increasing.
- There is a need for more short break and respite provision to support local families.

### What outcomes do we want for our children and young people with SEND?

The National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTI) outlines four pathways to ensure young people with SEND have improved life chances.

In West Berkshire, we want our young people to:

- **Have access to employment wherever possible, or to meaningful occupation**
- **Live as independently as they can**
- **Have friends and relationships and be part of their local communities**
- **Have good physical and emotional health**

These pathways, and our reasons for change, inform our vision for SEND in West Berkshire.

## Vision Statement

*Children with SEND in West Berkshire deserve the right support, adjustments and interventions, at the right time, to thrive in childhood and to prepare well for adulthood.*

To realise this ambition, we will continue to focus on principles of early help and prevention; supporting providers to identify and support children with SEND as soon as possible, offering high quality support and reducing dependence on external interventions. We will empower professionals to offer an inclusive, quality-first approach, with clear pathways to services for children with the highest need.

Many parents and carers told us that they felt relief and validation when an EHCP for their child was issued, knowing that this was likely to provide access to a higher level of support for their child. We want to ensure that more support is available to children without an EHCP, and that parents have greater confidence in schools' ability to meet their child's needs without an EHCP. Wherever possible, we want help to be available at the point of need, without a requirement for families to repeat their stories to service providers.

We will aim to implement this strategy in close partnership with families and children themselves. To achieve this, we will empower

our local Youth Forum and Parent Carer Forums to co-produce key projects with us. We have already begun this process by bringing the West Berkshire Youth Forum under the management of the council, with clear planning in place to increase the profile and impact of the group. A co-production charter will be established; setting out shared commitments towards co-production by all parties. The wishes and interests of children and families will continue to be a central consideration in how we establish and deliver services for SEND, as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014, the SEND Code of Practice and the Government's SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan.

Some families need to travel further than others to access the support they need. This is partly because some provision is concentrated in built up areas around the M4 corridor, putting families who live in rural parts of the county at a disadvantage. Some children also need to travel significant distances to access an independent or non-maintained setting outside of the local area. In delivering this strategy, we will aim to give families access to more of the support they need closer to the areas in which they live.

The safety, health and overall wellbeing of children will remain at the heart of our planning for SEND. We will ensure that projects are undertaken in partnership with key partners from health, social care and the voluntary sector

### Strategic Priorities:

- The Early Years
- The Universal Offer
- Increasing Local Specialist Provision
- Pathways to Adulthood
- EBSA and Young People's Mental Health
- Short Breaks and Respite

### Principles:

- Early Help and prevention
- Person-centred and trauma-informed approaches
- Co-production with children and families
- Offering help as close as possible to the areas in which families live.
- A holistic approach to meeting children's needs.
- Maximising independence for young people with SEND



## Priority: The Early Years

### SEND Young Person's Survey 2023 - Response

*"I am very happy with the support offered from West Berks. Since R's birth and his diagnosis with a rare genetic condition (and additional ASD diagnosis) we cannot fault the support we have been offered"*

**– Comment from a Parent on behalf of a Young Person,**

In West Berkshire, we know that many of our children with additional needs receive good support and care between birth and age five. Our health visitors provide a vital service identifying developmental concerns. Many early years settings offer fantastic, wrap-around support to children in close partnership with other services. In structured feedback sessions, some families shared examples of nurseries going above and beyond to help their children transition effectively to an appropriate school place. West Berkshire Council's Early Development and Inclusion Team (EDIT) provides vital guidance and support to families and professionals about the best ways to support a child's development. Intervention from paediatricians and therapists make a considerable difference to young children requiring specialist help.

However, we also know that some of our children with SEND are not receiving the support they need, or are eligible for, as early as possible. The COVID 19 pandemic created a backlog in 2½ year reviews by health visitors. Responses to our Early Years census in 2022 indicate that 58% of Early Years settings identified no children with SEND who do not have an EHCP, suggesting under identification of SEND in young children. Surveys undertaken by local training providers reveal low levels of confidence in some settings to identify and work with children who are neurodiverse, or who have speech and language needs. Attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage is lower in some areas than the South East or England as a whole, and families remain frustrated by barriers and waiting times for paediatricians and speech and language therapists.

## How have we done? (2018-2023)

A new specification for health visitors and school nurses was agreed by West Berkshire's Public Health Team and the new service was commissioned across Berkshire West. Dingley's Promise launched their own newsletter and network meeting for Family Support Workers in the Early Years. An Early Years Toolkit was launched,

offering professionals advice, guidance and resources for different areas of need on the West Berkshire Council website. The Early Development and Inclusion Team was slightly increased in size to reduce waiting times to access the service and a training programme for early years settings, "Through my eyes" has helped to develop the skills of staff working with children with speech, language and social communication difficulties.

## What are we going to do now?

### Our objectives are:

To put in place whole system ownership of inclusion and improved awareness of SEND needs in the Early Years.

To improve awareness and take up of the Early Years entitlement amongst families with SEND children.

To make sure that eligible children are identified early and timely referrals are made to the Early Years Development and Inclusion Team (EDIT) and Dingley's Promise.

To ensure referral pathways for paediatricians, occupational and speech therapy are as streamlined as possible.

To ensure the referral pathways for paediatricians, occupational and speech and language therapy are clearly publicised for families.

To ensure funding mechanisms for the early years settings promote early intervention and transition to school.

To improve quality of inclusion practice within Early Years settings.

To ensure families and professionals are aware of services available to children awaiting neurodiversity assessment.

To ensure that families are able to access speech and language therapy, where needed, as soon as possible and access support whilst they are waiting.

To ensure families are able to access information about early years services easily via the SENDLocal Offer.

To ensure parents and families have access to peer support.

To ensure that settings and schools know what effective transition planning looks like.

To ensure that children have a managed pathway into a specialist school setting where appropriate.

### Our projects are:

We will establish an Early Years SEND Strategy Group, with representation from all types of early years provider, and from families.

We will create an Early Years Inclusion Dashboard.

We will conduct a review of referral routes for OT's and paediatricians.

We will establish a pathway for health visitors to make direct referrals to the EDIT team via an early alert form.

We will establish a list of contacts in Early Years settings and publicise this with Health Visitors and other relevant colleagues.

We will include the take up of 2 year health checks by health visitors within the Early Years Inclusion Dashboard.

We will review this data within the Early Years SEND Strategy Group and SEND Strategic Partnership Board. We will use this information to support the health visiting service to achieve a sustained increase in the take up of health checks.

We will establish a multi-agency, pre-school triage for families in need of support.

We will conduct a review of available funding mechanisms in the Early Years.

We will support settings with events targeting roles where there is a shortage of candidates.

We will seek ongoing funding for the “Through my Eyes” training project.

We will support the local implementation of the SEN Co qualification for the Early Years which has been proposed by the SEND Implementation Plan.

We will review the capacity of EDIT team to support inclusion in mainstream settings, in particular, the use of trained teaching assistants to model strategies in settings.

We will develop a document establishing standards of “Ordinarily Available” provision for SEND in the Early Years. This will include an identification and self-evaluation tool.

We will conduct a review of therapy services, including speech and language, to ensure that the pathways for access are as streamlined as possible.

We will ensure that families are aware of services intended to support them whilst they wait for neurodiversity assessment, and that we scaffold their access to these services where possible.

We will conduct a review of Early Years pages on the local offer following the retender of directory.

We will conduct an audit of local peer to peer support groups for parents and carers and publicise these via the Local Offer.

We will introduce a transitions partnership agreement between settings.

We will support the local implementation of expected transitions guidance from the Department for Education has been launched.

We will review the viability of establishing an assessment-style nursery.

# Priority: The Universal Offer for SEND

## SEND Young Person's Survey 2023 - Responses

### *What works well for you in your place of learning?*

*"My teachers know that I am different from a lot of the other children and are trying to help me learn how to play and communicate better with the other children"*

*"People knowing me well, having flexibility to adapt when I'm not in the right mood, being at a small school who can do that for me, adults who help me through things"*

**– Comments from Young People,**

*"The teacher is brilliant at working to meet my child's individual needs when learning (ADHD and possibly ASD)"*

**– Comments from Parents, Carers or Professionals on behalf of a Young Person,**

The majority of children with SEND in West Berkshire are supported within a mainstream school, by a universal offer of services and provision. In most cases, children with SEND are able to have their needs met by this universal offer. Most mainstream schools in West Berkshire are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, offering strong differentiation and adjustments for children with SEND. Additional needs are often identified early and children are appropriately supported by a graduated and therapeutic approach. Where necessary, timely requests are made for more specialist assessment, therapy provision and other forms of support. In a recent survey, the majority of parents and carers agreed or strongly agreed that their concerns about their child's SEND were listened to by their child's school. In a separate survey, the majority of responding children said they were having their needs met completely or most of the time in their place of learning.

However, families have also shared concerns about the support they are receiving through this universal offer. Some parents feel that support is not offered quickly enough or their child's needs are not fully understood. There is frustration about waiting times for certain services, including autism assessments and therapy services. Schools also told us of the barriers they face when trying to implement good practice. Adapting classroom environments to meet an increasingly diverse range of need can be challenging,

particularly given the age and configuration of some schools. In the wake of the pandemic, recruiting and retaining staff has become much more difficult, including the staff needed to support children with SEND. All schools face the continuing pressure of delivering the national curriculum, which can emphasise formal qualifications over functional skills. In our SEND Survey for Young People, children told us about the importance of the classroom environment, sensory adjustments, flexible teaching approaches, positive relationships and individual support for some activities when planning to meet their needs.

### **How have we done? (2018-2023)**

A suite of documents intended to promote good practice for children with SEND in mainstream schools was published. This included a guide on SEND provision which should be "ordinarily available" in all schools, a Teacher's Handbook on identification and provision for SEND and an Autism Toolkit. Therapeutic Thinking, a new approach to behaviour management in schools, was launched, with most maintained schools participating in training and delivery. An audit of school accessibility planning was completed and new guidance outlining school duties under equalities legislation was launched. West Berkshire Council's Autism Team has been expanding in order to offer more direct support

to children in schools and an EBSA Team has been created to support children who have difficulty attending school due to anxiety. Additional funding has been made available

to schools which can be accessed without an EHCP and SEND training has been enhanced including very well received annual SENCO conferences.

## What are we going to do now?

### Our objectives are:

To ensure that mainstream schools have appropriate capacity, resources and space to support children with SEND.

To create funding models which support early intervention and inclusion at the point of need and without the need for an EHCP.

To support schools to recruit and retain good calibre staff.

To empower professionals to identify and support children with SEND in mainstream settings, including those with more complex needs.

To empower professionals to support children with speech and language/occupational therapy needs

To provide sufficient access to Speech and Language/Occupational Therapy advice and intervention for children with and without EHCP's.

To develop a more cohesive SEN support offer for schools.

To improve awareness of the Early Help offer in West Berkshire, including the process for establishing lead professional support.

### Our projects are:

We will support the local implementation of national standards for SEND and of the Local Inclusion Partnership.

We will pilot a project enabling mainstream schools to bid for funding to develop or enhance inclusion spaces. Bids will need to be supported by enhanced accessibility planning.

We will seek to ear mark funding from the high needs block budget for children with SEND which can be accessed without an EHCP and establish a process for schools to access this fund.

We will establish the viability of creating a specialist SEND teacher role to advise mainstream schools on adapting the curriculum for children with very complex needs.

We will develop a business case for increasing capacity in West Berkshire Council's Autism Team to reflect increasing demand.

We will develop business case for creation of HLTA posts within the Cognition and Learning Team to provide more direct support to schools.

We will review whether a single point of access for SEND Support services can be implemented.

We will develop a community of practice for schools, focused on inclusion within the school environment.

We will create transitions guidance, based on therapeutic principles, to support successful primary to secondary transition.

We will trial recruitment events, targeting specific roles.

We will establish several projects to identify potential areas of unmet training need, including:

- An audit of SEND training offered by the council and partner organisations.
- A detailed review of specialist educational placements to establish whether opportunities were missed to identify these children earlier.
- A survey or focus group with teachers and professionals to understand where gaps in knowledge, experience and confidence may lie

We will support the Cognition and Learning Team to create on-demand training for TA's and teachers.



We will develop a training accreditation for TA's, including a focus on Trauma Informed Practice.

We will review review early career training SEND content for teacher.

We will work with SEND IASS to deliver training for parents on Ordinarily Available Provision for children with SEND.

We will adapt the SEND identification handbook for secondary schools.

We will support implementation of new, leadership level NVQ.

We will conduct a review of referral routes for Occupational Therapists and paediatricians.

We review our joint capacity to support children with Speech and Language/ Occupational Therapy needs who don't have an EHCP.

We will promote Speech and Occupational Therapy resources from the Children and Young People's Integrated Therapy Team.

We will review the capacity of the Early Development and Inclusion Team to offer termly caseload meetings After children have transitioned to primary school.

We will review our iCollege model to consider the capacity of iCollege to provide more support before children are permanently excluded.

We will establish an Early Help Partnership Board which will be responsible for monitoring and improving the Early Help offer in West Berkshire.

We will work in partnership with the Early Help Partnership Board to improve take up and awareness of the Early Help Offer in West Berkshire.

TRAUMA

# Priority: Increasing Local Specialist Provision

## SEND Young Person's Survey 2023 - Responses

### **What works well for you in your place of learning?**

*"A quiet space helps me to learn and to focus like the HRB [Hearing Resource Base]. I enjoy Sensory Circuits because it helps me warm up for the day ahead of me"*

*"Having TA support if I need it and the ACE unit [Resource for Children with Specific Learning Difficulties]"*

**– Comments from Young People,**

*"The genuine caring attitude of staff [at a West Berkshire Special School]. The ethos of the school is seen through everything it does."*

**– Comment from Parent, Carer or Professional on behalf of a Young Person,**

A minority of children with an EHCP require a specialist educational placement to meet their needs. In West Berkshire, most children requiring specialist provision are able to take up a school place at a mainstream school with a resourced provision, a special school or other type of setting maintained by the local authority. These settings can accommodate a wide range of needs effectively. In feedback sessions, many parents and carers told us of the relief they felt when they secured a place for their child at a specialist setting. Our local maintained special schools were particularly singled out by families for their excellent educational provision.

However, this continuum of specialist provision has been placed under significant pressure due to surging local need. The steady expansion of our special schools over time has not been sufficient to prevent waiting lists, placing a strain on families when special school places cannot be allocated. With both special school sites close to their physical limits, special school provision in West Berkshire now requires reorganisation to achieve the necessary increase in spaces. The number of children with Autism and SEMH needs requiring a placement has also continued to rise, despite the opening of new primary and secondary settings for this cohort. More specialist places for children with acute EBSA are also required to support the increasing number of children in this

cohort since 2018. The High Need Block, West Berkshire Council's funding for all children with SEND, has been placed under pressure by the rising numbers of children requiring a placement at an independent or non-maintained setting.

### **How have we done? (2018-2023)**

New provision for secondary aged children with SEMH needs (The Castle @ Theale) opened in September 2022 and will have 18 children on roll in autumn 2023. When fully open it will cater for 42 children and young people. Development is underway on an equivalent provision for children of primary age at Kennet Valley School, with a planned opening date of September 2024. In addition extra places for children in this cohort have been created as part of West Berkshire's ICollege provision, the Pod and Pod Plus.

Two capital projects, aiming to expand the number of places at both local maintained special schools in the short to medium term, are in development and are due to be completed in September 2024.

We have set up new provision in a local primary school to meet the needs of 12 children who would otherwise have been placed in a special school.

## What are we going to do now?

### Our objectives are:

To provide sufficient places for children with moderate/severe/profound learning difficulties in the short, medium and long term.

To develop a robust system for predicting demand for special school places.

To develop a sufficient range of maintained specialist placements within West Berkshire to meet the current and potential need of pupils with autism / SEMH.

To ensure a greater proportion of children who require a specialist placement are able to access one without the need for an interim space at iCollege or in a mainstream school.

### Our projects are:

We will increase the number of spaces available at local special schools by 2025.

We will seek to give the new SEND provision at Westwood Farm the formal status of a resourced provision for children with MLD/SLD.

We will develop another equivalent SEND primary resource in West of the authority for children with MLD/SLD.

We will develop secondary resources for children with MLD/SLD in the East and West of the authority.

We will review the viability of a pan-Berkshire provision to meet the needs of children with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties.

We will develop and utilise a forecasting methodology, based on SCAP forecasts, to determine our need for additional special school places and other specialist provision in the long term. In particular, we will utilise forecast data to determine if a new school, or equivalent provision is required to meet longer term demand for special school places for children with learning difficulties.

We will deliver the planned SEMH/Autism provision at Kennet Valley School by September 2024.

We will develop equivalent SEMH/Autism provision for primary aged children in the West of the authority.

We will keep under review demand for secondary SEMH/Autism provision to establish whether more places are needed than the total number offered by The Castle@Theale provision.

We will conduct a review of existing resourced provisions/units within mainstream schools to establish if there are gaps within existing provision.

We will conduct an audit of informal inclusion units which have been set up in some primary settings to establish whether there is scope to formalise and develop these as Local Authority provisions.

We will review the role of the Pod and Pod Plus as part of long term provision for children with EHCPs for SEMH/Autism.

# Priority: Pathways to Adulthood

## SEND Young Person's Survey 2023 - Responses

### **What works well for you in your place of learning?**

*"Now that I am in Sixth form I can allocate my free periods to the subjects I choose. With fewer teachers and subjects feedback and next steps are easier to track. The schools SenCo department has been really helpful helping me apply for adult things like a provisional drivers licence"*

### **Comments from a Young Person with SEND**

*"Everything is good at the moment. More career advice in the next few years would be good as well as a variety of work experience."*

**– Comment from Parent, Carer or Professional on behalf of a Young Person**

Transition to adulthood can be a confusing period for young people with SEND. In addition to the typical challenges experienced by young adults at this age, young people with SEND are likely to face changes in their education, health and social care provision. Planning early for these changes can help ensure that transition to adulthood is a positive, rather than challenging, period in a young person's life. The SEND Code of Practice is clear; aspirations towards independent living, employment and participation within the community should be encouraged as soon as additional needs are identified. Planning for transition to adulthood is also a statutory requirement for EHCP reviews from Year 9 onwards. West Berkshire Council has a dedicated Transitions Team which supports young people with complex needs as they move into adulthood. Our local special schools, in collaboration with partners, have established excellent supported internship programmes, offering clear pathways to work related activity and employment for young people with learning difficulties. The Council commissions a supported employment service for young people aged 16 to 25 with EHCPs. The Council's SEND Team, responsible for coordinating EHCP reviews, has a strong track record of supporting families and professionals to plan for transition. A high percentage of pupils with SEND in West Berkshire, achieve a sustained education, apprenticeship or employment destination when compared to similar figures for the South East and England as a whole.

However, not all children with SEND in West Berkshire experience a positive transition to adulthood. In our SEND Young Person Survey, some young people above the age of 16 said that planning had not taken place to help them consider their next steps or that they weren't sure if any had, suggesting that more should be done ensure young people are active participants in their own transition planning. The gap in the employment rate between those with and without Learning Disabilities is also slightly higher in West Berkshire than other boroughs. This is despite the presence of excellent supported internship programmes, supported employment schemes and apprenticeships for SEND young people. Families and providers have also told us of limitations in the local curriculum offer for young adults; there are not enough vocational courses and the range of local apprenticeships has become more limited

## **How have we done? (2018-2023)**

Since 2018, both local special schools have worked with partners to develop or expand supported internship programmes. Newbury College has reviewed and relaunched its SEND courses to give more emphasis to preparation for adulthood and access to employment. In 2022, new Preparing for Adulthood guidance was launched, setting out pathways of support for those moving into adulthood with SEND. A programme of work experience for young

EHCP holders in mainstream schools, was launched in 2021. Work has also been undertaken to improve professional practice at schools and Further Education Providers. West Berkshire Council agreed a definition of work-related employment, including expected standards with partners and shared this with local post 16 and further education providers.

The Careers and Enterprise Company established a local newsletter for careers leads in schools and a community of practice group for mainstream careers leads, with a focus on provision for young people with SEND, was established.

## What are we going to do now?

### Our objectives are:

To offer young people with SEND sufficient opportunities to develop their independent living skills.

To provide easily accessible information about the support and pathways which are available for young people transitioning to adulthood.

To increase opportunities for young people with SEND to access their local communities and to interact with their peers.

To ensure that children's health needs are planned for in a holistic way.

To support the transition between CAMHS and adult mental health services.

To ensure young people transitioning from paediatric to adult health services are able to access support in a timely way and do not experience significant gaps in service.

To raise awareness and improve uptake of learning disability health checks.

To empower mainstream schools to offer a well-rounded and holistic careers curriculum to pupils with SEND.

To support pupils with SEND to access meaningful work experience linked to their interests.

To extend Post 16 opportunities for young people with SEND which will lead to employment, including increased access to supported internships.

To ensure that annual reviews from Year 9 upwards are holistic and consider all aspects of a young person's transition to adulthood.

To provide peer to peer support for parents and carers of young people transitioning to adulthood.

### Our projects are:

We seek to develop short breaks for children with learning disabilities with a focus on independence skills.

We will seek to short breaks for children in the mainstream range of ability with a focus on independent living skills.

We will coordinate workshops for young people and families on transition related themes.

We will update and reorganise the Preparing for Adulthood pages on the SEND Local Offer into a "toolkit".

We will work with the voluntary sector to develop more post-16 activities for young people.

We will establish a new directory of work-related opportunities for young people with SEND.

We will work with the voluntary sector to pilot a "buddy" service for young people with SEND wishing to access mainstream activities.

We will review the commissioning of respite for young people over the age of 18.

We will explore whether a local network can be established for personal assistants Working with young people with SEND.

We will support the Parent Carer Forum to increase their membership of parents of young people over the age of 16.

We will work in partnership with health partners and families to implement the outcomes of a review into local transition pathways, including those for children in crisis.

We will work with health partners to implement the outcomes of a review into local transition pathways.

We will further develop the local SEND Community of Practice Group for careers leads from mainstream schools, including facilitating access to suitable role models.

We will launch our transition checklist and we will support the local implementation of expected national transitions guidance.

We will launch our Memorandum of Understanding for post-16 providers, establishing shared standards of provision for Further Education Providers.

We will increase the availability of Supported Internships through the government's programme.

We will implement the expected national adjustments passport.

We will review documentation which is shared when Annual Reviews are conducted from Year 9 onwards.



# Priority: EBSA and Young People's Mental Health

## SEND Young Person's Survey 2023 - Response

### What could help you in your place of learning?

*"Further access to play therapy, a more consistent approach, recognition of mental health difficulties before it reaches clinical levels"*

**– Comment from Parent, Carer or Professional on behalf of a Young Person**

Since 2018, the number of children identified as Emotionally Based School Avoiders (EBSA) or who are Electively Home Educated (EHE) has increased significantly, with the COVID19 pandemic exacerbating a trend which was already causing concern. In West Berkshire, a range of support is available for children experiencing challenges with their mental health. The Emotional Health Academy, and Mental Health Support Team provide intervention for children with mental health challenges at low thresholds of need. Children who are identified as EBSA can receive intervention from the West Berkshire EBSA Team and Forum. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provides assessment for a range of significant and severe mental health needs, such as eating disorders, anxiety or depression, which are likely to require specialist health intervention.

We have made EBSA and children's mental health one of our core priorities for this strategy in recognition of its increasing impact on families and services. Families and stakeholders have been clear about the inconsistent provision and identification of EBSA within schools. In particular, we know that children with EBSA are not always being identified early enough and are sometimes

able to "mask" their anxiety in its early stages. Some families have also found pathways to Early Help unclear, particularly while they await assessment by CAMHS. Late or misidentification of EBSA may be contributing to the increased number of young people requiring specialist educational placements, with a high level of individualised support.

### How have we done? (2018-2023)

Mental Health Support Teams were established in West Berkshire schools and the Therapeutic Thinking approach to Behaviour Management was adopted, with the majority of maintained schools participating in training and delivery of this approach. The EBSA Team and EBSA Forum was created to provide professional advice and intervention for children who are struggling to attend for reasons of anxiety. Funding was allocated for schools to access in order to support children who were having difficulty attending school due to anxiety. The EBSA Team has worked in partnership with schools and families to achieve successful reintegration to school, on a partial or full time basis, for some children.

## What are we going to do now?

### Our objectives are:

To establish a well-informed workforce with a shared understanding and vision for children who are EBSA.

To ensure professionals know how children experiencing EBSA may present in their settings and have a point of contact to report concerns to.

To develop a responsive local authority service for children who are experiencing EBSA.

To improve delivery and accessibility of information for families awaiting assessment from the Neurodiversity Service/CAMHS.

To develop a more coordinated offer from support services for children experiencing EBSA.

To improve knowledge of, and access to, Early Help services for children who are experiencing EBSA.

To develop the capacity of mainstream schools to support children who are experiencing EBSA.

To develop the capacity of the local authority to support children who are experiencing EBSA.

To review available options for children who cannot be supported in mainstream settings.

### Our projects are:

We will coordinate a multi-agency EBSA conference or event.

We will establish a community of practice group to gain an understanding of how children with EBSA are being supported locally and to disseminate good practice. This group will relaunch our existing EBSA guidance, including clarification about potential sources of funding.

We will consider developing a new support document highlighting pathways of support for children with issues attending school.

We will deliver local training to professionals about “masking”.

We will review the local authority policy on the education of children who do not attend school for health or related reasons.

We will review the capacity of the local authority to meet the requirements of the statutory guidance on the above, including the role of the named contact.

We will review the feasibility of establishing an EBSA Triage within the local authority.

We will review the capacity of the EBSA and Autism Team within West Berkshire Council to meet demand.

We will consider developing or expanding local specialist provision to support children experiencing EBSA.



# Priority: Short Breaks and Respite

## SEND Young Person's Survey 2023 - Response

### What could help you in your place of learning?

*"[...] having some clubs or places i can go to meet people and friends like me."*

**– Comment from a Young Adult with SEND,**

*"Networks with other families and events where we can all be understood and our children can feel like they see other children like themselves [in particular for children with] ADHD [...]"*

**– Comment from Parent, Carer or Professional on behalf of a Young Person,**

Short breaks have the potential to prevent children from requiring specialist support and can offer children "opportunities to enjoy extra-curricular activities, respite and space to develop skills beyond their everyday school and home contexts"<sup>1</sup>. In West Berkshire, voluntary providers, such as Mencap and Swings and Smiles, offer a range of short breaks to children with SEND, including after school clubs, holiday fun days, youth clubs, weekend activities and outreach support. Local overnight respite is offered by the Castle Gate Residential Short Breaks Service, which has an Ofsted rating of "Good" and is well regarded by families. The local offer of short breaks and respite is documented on the West Berkshire Directory online. In our recent SEND Young Person Survey, 66.8% of all respondents felt they had access to some or a wide range of activities outside of school and home.

This local offer of short breaks and respite is under more pressure than ever before. In common with other service areas, providers are trying to meet the needs of a greater number of children, a larger proportion of whom have more complex health and behavioural

needs. The rising costs of accommodation, staffing and energy have made it hard for local providers to maintain their current offer, and harder still to expand to meet the needs of a greater number of families. In some cases, providers told us that they have been forced to concentrate their staffing on the needs of more complex children. These issues are likely to have contributed to results from The SEND Young Person Survey, which suggest that children with EHCP's feel they have access to a smaller range of extracurricular activities compared to their peers at SEN Support level.

### How have we done? (2018-2023)

The local coordination of short breaks and respite was not a specific priority in the previous SEND Strategy, although the Council has continued to provide funding to local short breaks providers. The Council's residential short breaks service, Castle Gate, achieved an Ofsted rating of "Good" in all areas in 2021 and sustained this rating at its 2023 inspection.

<sup>1</sup> Department for Education, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan (London, GOV.UK), 35

## What are we going to do now?

### Our objectives are:

To develop a robust, broad and sustainable short breaks offer.

To ensure short breaks are made available in a timely way to meet families' needs.

To develop a short breaks offer for children attending mainstream schools or specialist schools for Autism/SEMH.

To increase access to mainstream leisure activities for children with SEND.

To provide a flexible offer of support for carers of children with SEND.

To improve the accessibility of information for families on short breaks.

### Our projects are:

We will work with the voluntary sector and other agencies to promote

- Holiday schemes and after school clubs in the East.
- Additional afterschool provision in central and West Berkshire.
- Weekend provisions.
- Early Years provision.
- Post-16 provision.
- Provision for children and adults with highly complex health needs.

We will conduct a multi-agency review of the Castle Gate residential short breaks service to ensure there is optimum use of resources.

We will conduct an audit on the accessibility of mainstream leisure activities to young people with SEND in partnership with the Youth Forum and Parent Carer Forum.

We will consider coordinating "buddying" volunteer schemes to support children with SEND to access more mainstream leisure/ youth activities.

We will review the support available for families through Parent Carer Needs Assessments.

# Governance, Monitoring and Review

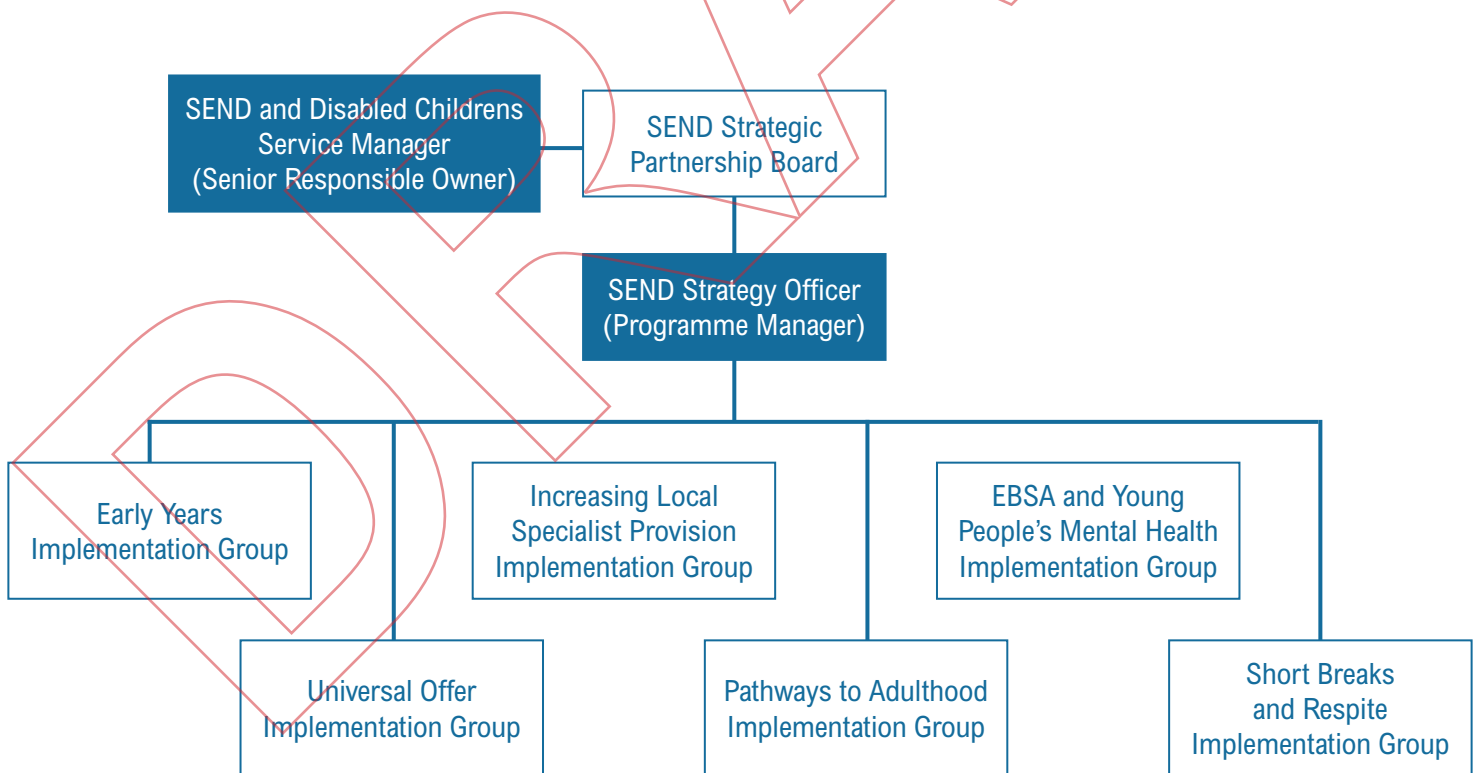
West Berkshire's SEND Strategy will be delivered in partnership by the council, the Integrated Care Board, health providers, schools and other services. We will implement this strategy in co-production with the local Parent Carer Forum and Youth Forum; agreeing a charter with these groups to establish a shared approach to co-production.

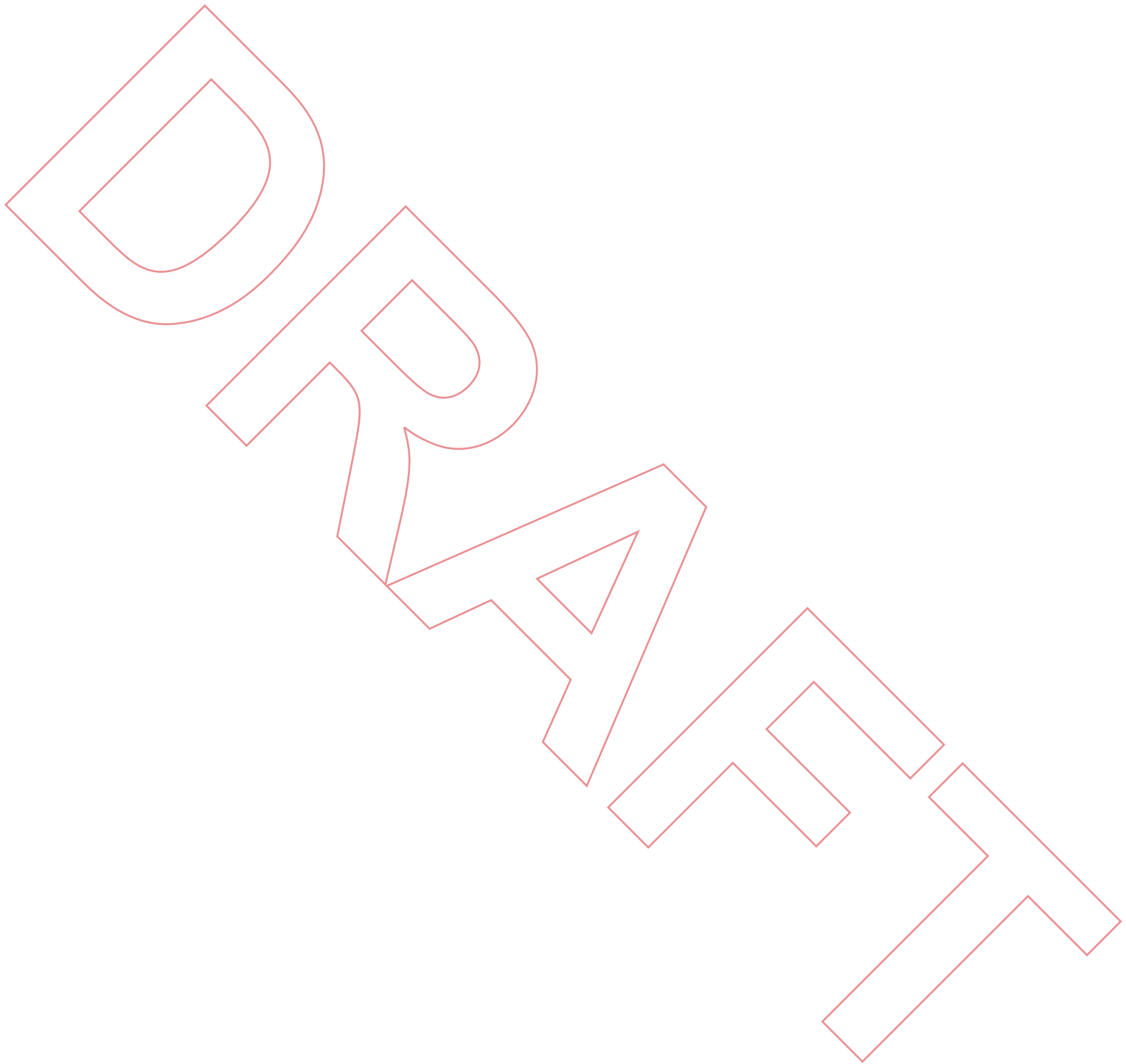
West Berkshire Council holds lead responsibility for the strategy and will monitor strategy delivery through the SEND Strategic Partnership Board, a group of senior leaders and stakeholders from Education, Health, Social Care and the voluntary sector. Where appropriate, the SEND Strategic Partnership Board will report on the SEND Strategy implementation to other senior groups within the council and the ICB.

We will create multi agency implementation groups to monitor the progress of strategy projects within each priority area. These strategy groups will agree project leaders, monitor Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), specify timescales and confirm success

measures for individual projects for each priority area and specify timescales and success measures for individual projects. Where necessary, these groups will seek approval from the programme manager to amend agreed timescales or alter success measures during the life of a project. Where there are shared strategic priorities, partnerships will be developed between the relevant implementation groups and other strategies, such as the West Berkshire Early Years Strategy and the Department for Education's Delivering Better Value Programme.

Strategy KPI's will be agreed during the first year of SEND Strategy implementation by the SEND Strategic Partnership Board. KPI's will be agreed for each priority area and will include a combination of outcome-based measures, such as school attainment or persistent absence figures, and process-based measures, such as, for example, the number of Inclusion Champions established in Early Years settings.





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We are committed to being accessible to everyone. If you require this document in an alternative format or translation, please call the SEN and Disabled Children's Team on Telephone 01635 551111.

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