



Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Deficit Management Plan – 2026 - 2029

This updated plan brings together the DSG deficit actions, the signed Local SEND Reform Plan, the place sufficiency plan, the latest data and the agreed financial assumptions. For children and young people with SEND, our plan focuses on earlier help, more local specialist places, a broader alternative provision offer, efficient transport arrangements and value for money.

Glossary table – terms used throughout this plan

Term	Full wording	Plain English explanation
AP	Alternative provision	Education arranged outside mainstream school, usually for children who cannot currently access mainstream education.
APST	Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce	A multidisciplinary team supporting pupils attending HPRS.
ASD	Autism	Autism, including needs linked to social communication, sensory processing and flexibility of thought.
Assistant EP	Assistant educational psychologist	A practitioner who supports the work of educational psychologists.
BSIL	Best Start in Life	The early years and family support programme focused on improving outcomes for children and families.
BSIP	Best Start Inclusion Practitioner	A practitioner providing early SEND support through Best Start Family Hubs and related settings.
DSG	Dedicated Schools Grant	Government funding provided to local authorities for schools and education-related funding, including high needs funding.
EAH	Experts at Hand	A SEND reform workstream providing specialist advice and support earlier.
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan	A statutory plan for a child or young person with special educational needs.

EHCNA	Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment	A statutory assessment which may lead to an EHCP.
EHE	Elective home education	Education provided at home by parents or carers by choice.
EOTAS	Education Otherwise Than At School	Education arranged other than at school.
EP	Educational psychologist	A psychologist who supports learning, development, emotional wellbeing and inclusion.
FF	Families First	Herefordshire's Families First approach to earlier, joined-up family help.
H3	Home, Hub and Hospital provision	Run by HPRS for children with health needs, including mental health needs, who are unable to attend their mainstream school.
HNB	High Needs Block	The part of the DSG used to fund support and provision for children and young people with higher levels of SEND.
HPRS	Herefordshire Pupil Referral Service	Herefordshire's only registered alternative provision school, run across a number of sites.
ICB	Integrated Care Board	NHS body responsible for planning local health services.
INMSS	Independent and non-maintained special schools	Non-maintained special schools are specialist, non-profit schools approved by the Secretary of State. They are independent of local authority control, usually run by charities or trusts, and charge fees on a non-profit basis. Independent schools are privately run and may make a profit.
LINC	Learning, Inclusion, Nurturing Children	SEMH intervention provision for children in KS1 and KS2.
LISO	Local Inclusion Support Offer	The local offer of support to help schools and settings meet children's needs earlier.
MLD	Moderate learning difficulties	Learning needs that are greater than typical but not usually as complex as severe learning difficulties.
NEET	Not in education, employment or training	Young people aged 16 to 25 who are not in education, employment or training.

OT	Occupational therapist	A professional who supports children and young people with daily living, sensory, physical or functional needs.
PMLD	Profound and multiple learning difficulties	Very complex learning needs, often alongside physical, sensory or health needs.
PVI	Private, voluntary or independent nursery	Early years settings not run directly by the local authority or a maintained school.
SALT	Speech and language therapist	A professional who supports children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.
SEMH	Social, emotional and mental health needs	Needs linked to emotional wellbeing, behaviour, mental health or social development.
SEN2	DfE census of local authority SEN data	The annual Department for Education return about children and young people with SEN.
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities	A broad term covering children and young people who need additional support because of learning needs, disability or both.
SLCN	Speech, language and communication needs	Needs linked to understanding language, using language or communicating with others.
SLD	Severe learning difficulties	Significant learning needs requiring specialist support.
SRO	Senior Responsible Officer	The senior officer responsible for delivering the SEND Reform Plan.
SRP	Specialist resourced provision	Now to be called a specialist inclusion base.
SSA	Statutory school age	Children and young people who are of compulsory school age.
VFM	Value for money	Making sure funding is used effectively and has a clear impact.

Executive summary

Herefordshire faces significant and sustained pressure on the Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block. The historic DSG deficit of £17.2m at the end of 2024/25 has been overtaken by a forecast cumulative deficit of £38.2m by March 2026. The key drivers are rising numbers of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans, increasing complexity of need, insufficient local specialist capacity, growth in the use of unregistered alternative provision and EOTAS, post-16 pressures, transport impacts and reliance on independent and non-maintained special schools.

This three-year plan sets out a single, joined-up approach to reducing the rate of deficit growth. It does not assume that the deficit can be eliminated within three years. Instead, the plan sets out the actions that will be taken over this period to slow escalation, improve value for money and build the local capacity needed to support children and young people earlier, closer to home and in less costly provision where appropriate.

Over the three years of this plan, we aim to move support earlier, help more schools meet needs well, create more local places, and keep a secure grip on spending.

This will be achieved by:

- Strengthening early intervention through the Local Inclusion Support Offer, Experts at Hand, outreach, transition support, SENCO networks and graduated approach tools.
- Managing demand by reducing avoidable escalation to EHC needs assessments, independent placements, EOTAS and high-cost alternative arrangements.
- Increasing local sufficiency through a phased programme of mainstream support bases, expanded special school places and increased alternative provision.
- Improving support pathways through SEMH intervention, including LINC, Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce outreach, HPRS relocation and expansion, and clear referral, review and reintegration arrangements.
- Strengthening financial grip through quarterly cost-driver reviews, a shared dashboard, transport impact assessment, commissioning controls and value-for-money reporting.
- Reviewing progress regularly across the three years so the plan can respond to changes in demand, delivery and financial pressures.

Purpose and statutory context

The purpose of this three-year DSG Deficit Management Plan is to show how Herefordshire Council will manage High Needs Block pressures over the period of the plan. It sets out how we will comply with DSG conditions of grant, monitor High Needs Block spending, identify opportunities to improve value for money, continue to slow the rate of in-year spend, and maintain strong engagement with schools, settings, partners and families.

This revised version aligns the DSG plan with the signed Local SEND Reform Plan, June 2026. The DSG plan should therefore be read as the three-year financial and operational delivery plan that supports the wider SEND reform programme.

Over the three years of this plan, we will:

- Comply with DSG grant conditions and maintain clear financial oversight.
- Provide assurance to the Department for Education, Schools Forum and local governance that High Needs funding is being used effectively.
- Link financial decisions to better outcomes for children and young people.
- Reduce reliance on high-cost independent and out-of-area placements by strengthening local support and provision.
- Track progress through a shared reform and DSG dashboard, including demand, placements, workforce, transport, attendance, exclusions and finance.
- Review progress regularly so the plan can be adjusted as demand, delivery and financial pressures change.

Local context and financial position

Financial context

Herefordshire entered DSG deficit in 2019/20 as High Needs expenditure increased faster than DSG income. By the end of 2025/26 the DSG deficit stood at £36.3m. The current forecast position is significantly more challenging, with a forecast cumulative deficit of £62.2m by March 2027.

Financial indicator	Updated position for this plan
Historic DSG deficit	£36.3m at the end of 2025/26, retained as historic context.
Current forecast deficit	£62.2m by March 2027.
Main financial drivers	EHCP growth, independent and non-maintained placements, post-16 top-ups, alternative provision and EOTAS, specialist placement growth, transport and complexity of need.
How savings will be treated	Savings are indicative placement savings only and are subject to further financial impact and investment recovery tracking.
Transport	Transport is included as a separate impact area and will not be assumed as a saving unless evidenced through transport reporting.

Demand and needs profile

In 2025, 21.7% of pupils in Herefordshire schools were identified as having SEND, and 5.1% had an Education, Health and Care Plan. The latest reform data template uses 2,048 EHCPs as the baseline (SEN2 2026) and forecasts 3,842 EHCPs by 2029, an increase of 1,424 by 2029.

Demand indicator	Position used in this plan
SEND prevalence	23% of pupils identified in Herefordshire as SEND in 2025 – 5717 pupils (EHCP and SEN Support). This number only reflects school age children and those attending Herefordshire schools. It does not include younger children or post-16 or those attending a school in neighbouring authorities.
EHCP prevalence	5.1% of pupils held an EHCP in 2025.
EHCP baseline	2,048 EHCPs.
EHCP forecast	3,842 EHCPs by 2029

Forecast increase	A further 1,424 EHCPs forecast by 2029 (70% increase).
Primary needs profile	36.1% SEMH, 25.3% ASD, 14.7% SLCN. These three areas account for 76.1% combined.
Post-16 pressure	16 to 19 EHCPs forecast to rise from 400 to 793 by 2029. NEET young people (with SEN) are forecast to rise from 17 to 41 (410% increase) in the same period
Elective home education	SEN EHE forecast to rise from 94 to 180 by 2029. (91.4% increase)

Placement pressures

The placement profile highlights a longstanding shortage of specialist provision, with capacity failing to keep pace with the increasing needs of children and young people. This has resulted in a mismatch between need and the availability of appropriate local placements. Consequently, there has been growing reliance on independent and non-maintained special schools, out-of-county placements, alternative provision, Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS), and bespoke support packages.

Placement measure	Position used in this plan
Independent / non-maintained placements	231 placements budgeted with 110 growth placements throughout 2026/27 part of the agreed High needs block for 2026/27, 12% of the EHCP cohort at January 2026 census.
Local special school placements	444 current local special school placements, commissioned.
Resource / specialist base placements	113 placements in 2026, commissioned.
Alternative provision capacity	64 statutory AP places plus 25 H3 hospital school places.
AP demand	64 current statutory AP places, with demand around 100 pupils.
AP pupil growth	AP pupils rose from 134 in 2024 to 254 in 2025 and 360 in 2026; placements rose from 137 to 274 and 430.
EOTAS / educated elsewhere	5.2% (N=106) educated elsewhere including 2% (N=41) EHCP EOTAS.

Financial assumptions and cost avoidance methodology

This plan uses the updated unit costs confirmed for this version. The figures should be treated as indicative placement savings only. They are not cumulative and do not yet fully include capital costs, transport, statutory casework, related services, inflation, on-costs or set-up costs. A full financial impact and investment recovery tracker will be developed through the governance arrangements.

Cost used	Value to use in this plan	Use in this plan
Independent / non-maintained placement	£56,000	Used as the core comparator for financial modelling.
Local special school placement	£17,283	Used to estimate placement cost difference when a local special school place avoids or replaces an independent placement.
Resource base placement	£6,539	Used for mainstream resource base cost comparisons.
SEMH resource base placement	£10,539	Used where SEMH resource base provision is the relevant local alternative.
Transport	Separate impact area	Tracked separately through Home to School Transport governance.

Important note on savings

The figures in this plan are indicative placement savings only. They are not cumulative and need more work to include capital, transport, set-up costs, staffing, statutory casework, inflation and related services.

If successfully achieved, these measures are expected to reduce the forecast deficit by up to **£91.7m**, significantly improving the overall financial position. This assumes that all of the proposals and actions outlined within this report are implemented in full and delivered within the planned timescales.

It should be noted that the figures do not include the potential impact of the High Needs Stability Grant. Subject to approval by the DfE, the grant could provide funding equivalent to 90% of the cumulative deficit up to the end of the 2025/26 financial year. Based on current projections, this could result in approximately **£32.67m** of the deficit being covered by the DfE, further reducing the financial burden on the authority.

As the outcome of the High Needs Stability Grant application process has not yet been confirmed, this funding has been excluded from the forecasts shown below to provide a prudent assessment of the financial position. Confirmation of any award is expected during the **Autumn Term 2026**, at which point the financial projections will be updated accordingly. The grant therefore represents a potentially significant opportunity to improve the authority's overall deficit position beyond the actions already identified in this report.

Theory of change

The plan is based on our intention that: if Herefordshire gives help earlier, helps schools feel more confident, creates more local specialist and alternative provision, and keeps a closer check on spending, fewer children and young people should need crisis responses, EOTAS, out-of-county independent placements or long-term high-cost packages.

Input	Activity	Expected difference
SEND Reform Plan, governance and transformation funding	Develop and deliver Experts at Hand, Local Inclusion Support Offer, APST outreach and locality support.	Earlier support, fewer avoidable escalations and increased school confidence leading to reduced spend.
High Needs Capital, sufficiency planning and trust engagement	Create and phase in local mainstream support bases, special school places and AP capacity.	More children educated locally, reduced reliance on independent provision, better travel patterns leading to continued reduction in spend.
Finance, commissioning and dashboard oversight	Quarterly cost-driver reviews, placement decision scrutiny and value-for-money statements.	Improved financial grip and clearer evidence of impact including reduced spend.
Co-production with families, schools and children and young people	Use lived experience and school feedback to shape provision, pathways and communications.	Improved confidence, fewer disputes, better system responsiveness leading to reduced spend.

Workstream 1: Intervention First and Experts at Hand

This workstream will make specialist advice easier to access, help mainstream schools meet needs earlier, and reduce avoidable escalation. It links to Building Blocks 1 and 2 of the Local SEND Reform Plan.

Action	Milestone / timescale	Lead	How we will know
Develop and publish one joined-up Local Inclusion Support Offer and Experts at Hand access route.	Draft by September 2026; published by December 2026; evidence of use by March 2027.	Head of Additional Needs / SEND Reform Programme Manager	Schools and settings use one agreed route with clear thresholds and triage.
Deliver Experts at Hand in two pilot localities aligned to Family Hubs.	Pilot clusters confirmed by September 2026; workforce live by December 2026; operational across two clusters by March 2027.	Head of Additional Needs / ICB delivery partners	EAH active in two localities; Year 1 we will have recruited 16 EAH roles.
Recruit and deploy Year 1 EAH workforce.	Recruit: • 2 x SALT • 2 x OT • 3 x EPs • 3 x Assistant EPs • 1 x School Inclusion Adviser • 1 x Advanced SALT Practitioner with further roles to support the Year 1 target.	Head of Additional Needs / health partners	16 x EAH roles in Year 1 and 23 by Year 3.
Commission outreach from special schools and HPRS as part of Experts at Hand.	Specification agreed by September 2026; delivery starts by December 2026; impact reported by March 2027.	Commissioning leads	80% of schools requesting outreach will have received support within 4 weeks by March 2027.

Further develop SENCO networks, graduated approach tools and transition support.	Ongoing through 2026/27, with termly reporting.	SENCO Advisers / Additional Needs Service	Improved confidence, reduced escalation, stronger transition planning.
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Experts at Hand funding model Year 1-3 below:

H:\SEND Reform Data\Experts at Hand Spend Plan Updated DMP.xlsx

Workstream 2: Managing demand and reducing escalation

This workstream focuses on meeting needs earlier, so fewer children and young people need statutory assessment, specialist placements, EOTAS or independent provision because support came too late.

Action	Timescale	Lead	How we will know
Appoint a SEND Sufficiency Lead to implement shared needs analysis process to inform provision planning, workforce and commissioning.	Completed by November 2026; used for at least two key planning decisions by March 2027.	Head of Education Development / Data Analyst	Governance records show decisions based on the shared needs analysis.
Strengthen early intervention support in schools through workforce development – training, coaching, modelling and support	Training offer developed with school leaders by December 2026	Experts at Hand Lead	Training offer on the SEND Portal by January 2026. 80% requesting training will have training sessions booked by March 2027
Continued delivery of early intervention support in schools through Inclusion Outreach, EAH, APST and specialist outreach.	Routine offer by March 2027 with termly reporting.	Head of Additional Needs / SEND Reform Programme Manager	Stabilising trend in EHCNA requests, EHCPs and independent placements.
Improve dispute resolution through moving forward / signposting meetings where EHCNA is not agreed.	Operating by September 2026; reporting by March 2027.	Additional Needs Service Manager	Downward or stabilising trend in complaints and mediation requests and reduction in tribunal / remedy costs.
Recruit and introduce Best Start in Life Inclusion Practitioners to provide early SEND support through Best Start Family Hubs, network sites and home visits. Practitioners will offer advice, navigation, modelling, short focused interventions and	Advertise and recruit September 2026. Practitioners in post no later than January 2027.	Early Years SEND Manager	Families can access early SEND advice through Family Hubs; settings receive timely support and modelling; children with emerging needs are identified earlier; transition into Reception is better planned leading to fewer escalations to EHCNA

transition support for children aged 0 to 5 with emerging or additional needs.			;
Embed Families First ways of working to strengthen early help for children and families, including those with SEND. This will include use of the Family Help Assessment and Plan, Family Help Lead Practitioners, Team Around the Family arrangements, locality Family Help Teams and short pieces of direct work where needed.	New ways of working embedding from September 2026	Families First Service Manager	Families receive support earlier; practitioners use one assessment and one plan; education, health, social care and community partners work together more consistently; fewer families escalate because support was delayed or fragmented and they feel confident their child's needs can be supported.
Use Early Years SEN Inclusion Funding and Transition Funding to support children earlier, reduce gaps in support, and prevent unnecessary escalation to statutory assessment where needs can be met through targeted early intervention.	Ongoing, with annual review and termly monitoring	Early Years SEND Manager	Children receive earlier support; settings can evidence impact; schools receive earlier notice of transition needs; fewer gaps in support at Reception leading to fewer escalations to EHCNA

Workstream 3: Sufficiency of local specialist places

This workstream is central to reducing pressure on the budget. Herefordshire will increase local capacity through mainstream inclusion bases, resource bases, special school places and alternative specialist options. The programme is designed to reduce reliance on independent and non-maintained placements, reduce travel pressure and help more children learn closer to home.

Alternative Provision is both a pressure and an important part of the solution. HPRS currently has 64 statutory AP places, with current demand around 100 pupils. Herefordshire will expand AP as part of a tiered local system, ensuring AP is used for prevention, stabilisation, time-limited intervention and reintegration rather than becoming a default long-term pathway.

There is a strong interdependency between these projects. As new provision is developed and brought online, the system will be recalibrated to ensure that children are placed in the most appropriate educational setting for their needs.

At present, a number of children are placed in provision that is not the best match for their needs due to capacity constraints across the system. As new projects are delivered and children are moved into more appropriate placements, places will be released in other settings. This will improve the overall efficiency of the system, create additional capacity, and help ensure that children can access the right provision at the right time.

Planning assumptions used

The plan will use 444 current commissioned local special school placements, 113 commissioned resource / specialist base placements and 64 registered AP places as the baseline.

What is needed	Position used in this plan for final plan	Provision development
Increase Early Years SEND assessment places	Additional 8 places by September 2026	Widemarsh Explorers
Increase primary SLCN and ASD specialist base capacity.	16 SLCN / ASD places by September 2026.	Hampton Dene
Increase secondary ASD specialist base capacity.	Additional 8 by September 2026. Further 8 places September 2027	Aylestone ASD base
Increase primary SEMH specialist base capacity..	Additional 8 by September 2026.	Trinity Primary SEMH base

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Increase intervention SEMH provision for Year R, KS1 and KS2.	22 places by September 2026.	St Martin's SEMH provision
Increase primary SLD / PMLD and complex specialist capacity.	Additional 10 places by October 2026	Blackmarston building work
Increase all age SLD / PMLD and complex specialist capacity.	45 additional places phased over four years.	Westfield rebuild / expansion
MLD KS1 and KS2 provision with associated ASD / SEMH / SLCN needs.	25 places in September 2027 plus 15 places in September 2028.	Ryefield MLD provision
MLD KS3 and KS4 provision with associated ASD / SEMH / SLCN needs.	55 additional places by 2030	Collocated with SEMH special school
Specialist SEMH provision for children and young people whose needs cannot be met through mainstream support bases.	80 places by 2030.	SEMH special school
Further commissioning discussions with existing providers to explore increasing commissioned numbers, including with post 16 providers		
Increase statutory AP places for KS3 and 4	36 places by 2030	HPRS relocation and expansion
Develop statutory AP places for KS1 and 2	30 places by 2030	Redevelop St David's following HPRS relocation
Develop Tier 2 AP Intervention pathways	100 places by 2029	New AP School

Below is a strategic overview of the projects and associated funding that will enable the planned expansion, along with the key milestones that will drive delivery and impact.

Project	Additional places	Start Date	Capital £m
Create MLD specialist provision: Ryefield Centre 25 places	25	Sep-27	£0.45m
Create MLD specialist provision: Ryefield Centre Additional 15 places	15	Sep-28	
expansion of autism base at Aylestone High. Increase 8 places	8	Sep-27	£0.085m
HPRS New site to provide KS3/4 places 36 new places	36	Sep-28	£6.0m
HPRS New site to provide KS2 places 30 new places	30	Sep-28	
New Alternative Provision Centre 75 places	75	Sep-28	£6.0m
New Alternative Provision Centre 25 places	25	Sep-29	
Rebuild/Expansion of Westfield School 10 places	10	Sep-29	£6.25m
Rebuild/Expansion of Westfield School 10 places	10	Sep-30	
Total Additional Places	234		£18.785m

Workstream 4: Financial management, transport and value for money

This workstream sets out how spending will be checked and challenged. It will link expenditure, placement decisions, sufficiency delivery, transport and outcomes through one dashboard and governance cycle.

Action	Timescale	Lead	How we will know
Run quarterly cost-driver reviews, including independent placements, post-16, AP, EOTAS, transport and top-ups.	Quarterly from 2026/27.	Head of Strategic Finance / DSG Monthly Governance Group	Clear evidence of challenge, decision-making and action on cost drivers.
Produce a value-for-money statement.	By March 2027, then annually.	SRO / Head of Strategic Finance	Statement shows what was prioritised and why.
Develop financial impact and investment recovery tracker.	Prototype during 2026/27; refined as sufficiency projects open.	Finance / Education Development / Commissioning	Savings, costs and benefits tracked consistently.
Apply travel impact assessments to all new SEND and AP proposals.	Methodology agreed in 2026/27; applied to all active proposals.	Head of Transport and Access Services	Start and end-of-year specialist transport costs compared on the same basis.
Review administrative charges and recoupment for out-of-county pupils.	Annual review.	Head of Additional Needs / Finance	Charges are reviewed and recovery opportunities are pursued.
Review post-16 top-up expenditure with mainstream college providers.	During 2026/27 and 2027/28.	Education Development Lead / Post-16 Inclusion Adviser / Finance	Improved alignment of post-16 funding and reduced escalation of high-cost top-ups.

Key performance indicators and dashboard measures

The DSG plan will use the measures in the signed Local SEND Reform Plan to track progress. These measures will be monitored through the shared dashboard and reported through the SEND Reform Programme Board, SEND & AP Partnership, SEND & AP Strategic Assurance Board, Schools Forum and DSG finance governance as appropriate.

Theme	Metric	Baseline	Target
Inclusion	All CYP with EHCPs in mainstream settings including SRP	61.6%	65% by Year 3.
Inclusion	SSA CYP with EHCPs in mainstream settings including SRP	44.5%	48% by Year 3.
Local specialist provision	CYP with EHCPs in maintained / academy special school	15.8%	19.5% by Year 3.
Independent placements	CYP with EHCPs in independent placements	12.1%	8% by Year 3.
Out-of-county independent placements	CYP with EHCPs in independent schools out of county	8.5%	7.5% by Year 3.
EOTAS	CYP with EHCPs who are EOTAS	2%	1.5% by Year 3.
Demand	Requests for statutory assessment	582	No more than +5%.
EHCP numbers	Number of EHCPs maintained	2,048	No more than +10% by Year 3.
Attendance	Attendance for CYP with EHCPs	86.8%	88.5% by Year 3.
Experts at Hand	Number of recruited EAH roles	N/A	16 in Year 1, 23 by Year 3.
Access to expertise	CYP without EHCP supported by SALT / support workers	875	1,500 by Year 3.

Access to expertise	CYP without EHCP supported by OT / support workers	169	350 by Year 3.
Access to expertise	CYP without EHCP supported by EP / support workers	62	150 by Year 3.

Workforce and capacity assumptions

Workforce is a key risk and success factor. The phased Experts at Hand approach must be delivered without over-stretching specialist staff or drawing all capacity back into reactive statutory processes. The workforce plan will therefore protect time for consultation, coaching, modelling, outreach and prevention.

Workforce area	2025/26 baseline	2028/29 forecast / target
SALT FTE	22.5	34.12
OT FTE	9.94	13.41
EP FTE	7.62	18.08
Experts at Hand roles	N/A	16 in Year 1; 23 by Year 3

Risks, dependencies and mitigations

Risk	Impact	Mitigation	Owner / route
Workforce recruitment and retention challenges, especially SALT, OT and EP roles.	Delayed or reduced delivery of EAH, outreach and early intervention.	Agree a minimum operational model, phase roll-out by locality, use task shifting where appropriate and monitor vacancies through governance.	SRO, Head of Additional Needs, health delivery partners.
Capital delivery slippage.	Delayed place creation and continued reliance on independent / out-of-area placements.	Use phased delivery plans, readiness checks, exception reporting and early escalation to	Education Development Lead / Sufficiency Lead.

		High Needs Capital Board and SEND governance.	
Rurality and small school constraints.	Uneven access to EAH and reduced ability to host inclusion bases.	Use locality delivery, clustered support, outreach, grouped sessions and targeted support to remote schools.	SEND Reform Programme Manager.
Funding uncertainty beyond the three-year reform period.	Risk to sustainability of prevention and specialist workforce.	Develop business cases using DSG impact data, joint commissioning opportunities and evidence of reduced independent placement growth.	SRO / Finance / Joint Commissioning.
Variation in school inclusion practice.	Inconsistent outcomes, attendance, exclusions and placement stability.	Use data to identify priority schools, strengthen SENCO and leadership support, school improvement, coaching and outreach.	Head of Additional Needs / School Improvement.
Transport pressures offset placement benefits.	Local placement expansion may not deliver expected net value.	Apply travel impact assessment to all proposals and report through Home to School Transport Steering Group.	Head of Transport and Access Services.

Governance and reporting

The plan will keep monthly DSG finance checks and link these to SEND reform governance. This means finance, places, commissioning, workforce and outcomes are looked at together, not separately.

Meeting / group	Purpose	Frequency
DSG Monthly Governance Group	Review expenditure, cost drivers, mitigations and financial risks.	Monthly

SEND Reform Programme Board	Oversee delivery of reform workstreams, risks, dependencies, dashboard and milestone delivery.	Every 4 weeks
SEND & AP Partnership	Monitor SEND and AP strategy delivery, action plan and operational performance.	Every 6 weeks
SEND & AP Strategic Assurance Board	Provide strategic leadership, challenge, assurance and escalation.	Every 6 weeks
Children and Young People's Joint Commissioning Forum	Coordinate joint commissioning across the Local Authority and NHS partners.	Monthly
Schools Forum / Budget Working Group	Receive updates on DSG plan, financial position, Schools Forum decisions and school-facing impacts.	As scheduled
Home to School Transport Steering Group	Review travel impact assessments, transport costs and mitigations.	As scheduled

Implementation priorities for 2026/27

Publish and mobilise the updated Local Inclusion Support Offer and Experts at Hand access route.

Confirm and deliver the two EAH pilot clusters aligned to Family Hubs.

Deliver the Year 1 EAH workforce model and protect time for prevention, consultation and modelling.

Open or commission 22 Tier 2 KS1/2 LINC places and maintain commissioned capacity through the academic year.

Complete shared needs analysis and use it to inform at least two key planning decisions by March 2027.

Progress the sufficiency pipeline, including Hampton Dene, Aylestone, Trinity, St Martin's, Ryefield, Westfield and alternative specialist capacity options.

Agree and apply travel impact assessment methodology to all new SEND and AP proposals.

Set up quarterly cost-driver reviews and produce the first value-for-money statement by March 2027.

Use the shared dashboard for routine governance reporting, with clear escalation routes and decision records.

Year 2 priorities: 2027/28

Expand Experts at Hand and outreach activity based on Year 1 learning.

Use dashboard data to identify schools, settings and cohorts needing more targeted support.

Continue delivery of the sufficiency pipeline, including further specialist and Alternative Provision development.

Review whether early intervention activity is reducing escalation to EHCNA, EHCPs, EOTAS and independent placements.

Strengthen locality working between education, health, social care, Families First and community partners.

Refresh the financial impact tracker using actual costs, placement data and transport information.

Year 3 priorities: 2028/29

Review the overall impact of the three-year plan.

Update demand forecasts, placement trends and financial assumptions.

Test whether the sufficiency programme is reducing reliance on independent and non-maintained placements.

Review whether the Local Inclusion Support Offer, Experts at Hand, Best Start Inclusion Practitioners, Families First and Alternative Provision pathways are reducing escalation.

Confirm the next phase of local place development and commissioning.

Prepare the next DSG Deficit Management Plan.

Statement of Assumptions and Risk

The delivery of the planned DSG deficit recovery is subject to a number of strategic, operational and financial risks. Financial projections contained within this plan represent the Local Authority's current best estimate and are based on a set of assumptions regarding demand, expenditure controls, sufficiency developments, SEND reforms and the delivery of identified savings.

Where planned interventions do not achieve the anticipated outcomes, are implemented later than planned, or require amendment following consultation or decision-making processes, the Authority reserves the right to revise the actions, financial forecasts and recovery timetable within future iterations of the Deficit Management Plan. Progress against all actions will be monitored through established governance arrangements and reported regularly to relevant decision-making bodies.