

Annex A - Delivering Better Value in SEND (DBV) strategy sessions

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

As part of the consultation phase of the DBV programme in March 2022, a series of strategy sessions took place with participating authorities to discuss the programme and DfE's proposed approach. Questions emerging from these sessions have been collated and summarised in this document with responses.

Overview

DBV is a new programme, that together with the safety valve programme, is part of the DfE's support package to help local authorities maintain effective SEND services while functioning sustainably. The programme will run in 3 tranches.

The programme will comprise two phases as follows;

Phase 1: 6 months – supported by a delivery partner, SEND Advisers and Financial advisers and involving comprehensive diagnostics comprising:

- Local area stocktake (assessment of existing processes, plans, capability, relationships, etc.).
- Facilitation of key stakeholder engagement for each authority
- Data analysis and assurance.
- Identification of root cause/underlying cost drivers and mitigating solutions/reforms.
- Improvement plan including reform implementation critical path
- A quality assured DSG management plan.

DfE will provide a small grant to support data analysis and assurance at the beginning of this phase.

DfE will agree with each LA critical elements of its action plan to be funded at the end of phase 1.

Phase 2: 18 months – supported by SEND Advisers and regional teams. Implementation of action plans produced in phase 1, with critical elements funded through Section 14 grants.

The following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) have been grouped into common themes:

Programme development and engagement with stakeholders

1. What are the parameters for DBV? What made an LA eligible for the programme? – *The next set of authorities with the highest DSG deficits (based on 2020-21 accounts) after those selected for the 2022-23 safety valve programme were selected for the DBV programme.*
2. If the 55 LAs have been chosen at a point in time, will the list of LAs who are invited to take part in the programme be recalibrated? – *No. LAs not included in the safety valve and DBV programmes will be supported by the ESFA stakeholder engagement team.*
3. If we opt out of DBV, will we be invited to the Safety Valve (SV) programme? - *No. LAs who have engaged with DBV but still have significant historic deficits may be invited to the safety valve programme in 2023-24.*
4. Which other LAs are part of the DBV programme? – *Full list attached at Annex B.*
5. Are there any connections between the SV and DBV programmes? - *Both programmes are part of the Department's effort to support authorities with addressing their DSG deficits though distinct programmes targeted at different LA cohorts depending on the severity of their deficit issues. There is close working between the SV and DBV teams with emerging trends and learnings constantly being shared.*
6. Is there cross-departmental sign up to the DBV programme? - *DfE is liaising with NHS, Ofsted, CQC and DLUHC on the development of the programme and will ensure the joined-up working continues through delivery. Local health partners are expected to be engaged with as part of the diagnostic phase and NHS will be represented on the Sector Steering Group.*
7. Is the DfE engaging with schools and teachers' associations through this programme? How will schools play a part in this programme? - *The DfE is engaging with some schools' forums as part of the development of the programme. Local schools' forums are expected to be consulted as part of the diagnostic phase and Schools/Academies will be represented on the Sector Steering Group.*
8. How are National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) involved and what's the DfE's expectation of Parent Carer Forum (PCF) engagement for this programme? - *DfE is keen that authorities engage their local PCFs in the diagnostic phase of the programme. Local stakeholder engagement will be important to ensure everyone has fed into the plan or has bought into the outcomes the LA wants to achieve together. The delivery partner and Advisers can help facilitate this engagement. The NNPCF will be represented on the Sector Steering group.*

LA participation in the DBV programme

9. What is the process for LAs to confirm that they are interested in taking part in the programme? - *DfE has enrolled all 55 LAs in the programme as part of the invitation however authorities not keen to participate are welcome to opt out.*
10. What is the decision-making process to establish the first 20 LAs who will take part in the programme in June – *We prioritised authorities with the most significant deficits, tried to ensure a balanced spread of Advisers per tranche, and took into consideration specific LA requests.*
11. When and how will the remaining LAs be brought onto the programme? - *LAs in tranches 2 and 3 will be brought on as quickly as possible, we are anticipating autumn 2022 for tranche 2 and Spring 2023 for tranche 3. However, DfE and the delivery partner will engage with these tranches prior to their expected start date, to share emerging learnings from the first tranche and prep onboarding closer to their start time.*

Existing DfE and LA programmes and initiatives

12. How does the DBV programme align with any plans and initiatives that LAs already have in place? - *The DfE will direct the delivery partner to work with any existing plans and initiatives that LAs may have already established as a starting point, the DfE do not want LAs to be repeating existing work action plans as part of the DBV programme rather to enhance them. The DBV programme looks to support the work that LAs are already undertaking with their improvement and transformation plans and not to create another action plan that sits alongside it. The extra resources and data analysis in the diagnostic phase could help LAs to evaluate their existing plans against the data analysis and diagnostics that will be undertaken. If the existing LA action plan is validated by the data analysis and diagnostics then this can be proposed to the DfE, or the existing plan could be amended based on the outcomes of the data analysis and diagnostics.*
13. How does the DBV programme align with the Dedicated School Grants (DSG) management plans that LAs already have in place? - *The DSG management plan will remain a fundamental document for the DBV programme. The programme will take existing plans into consideration and look to see where the DfE can offer additional support to LAs to quality assure those plans. The diagnostic phase can bring in additional, wide-ranging and cross-sector support to identify what more you could be doing to supplement and improve the plans already in place.*
14. For those LAs with a financial recovery programme, does the DBV programme replace that or will current financial recovery programmes run in parallel to this programme? - *The programme will incorporate,*

build upon and enhance existing recovery plans so LAs remain on one seamless improvement journey.

15. Is there a link between a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) and DBV? Will there be a mechanism for the two to talk together? - *As part of the diagnostic phase, all existing action plans in an LA will be reviewed. The newly developed action plan should be holistic and incorporating existing plans to avoid duplication. The DfE have asked Ofsted to incorporate DBV and associated outputs into their framework and Ofsted are committed to this approach.*

Programme scope, aims and outcomes

16. What are the outcomes of the DBV Programme from a DfE perspective? What will good look like to the DfE? - *The aim of the programme is to relieve some of the pressure in the system (in the short-term, before the more comprehensive and systemic SEND Review reforms are enacted) by supporting LAs to provide high quality SEND services that work and are sustainable and affordable so they are better-placed to meaningfully implement the recommendations of SEND review when they come into place.*
17. Do all outcomes of the programme need to be delivered in the 24-month period that LAs will be engaging with DBV? - *The action plan created as part of DBV will be LA specific and needs to work for the area. The action plan should be credible and cover a timeframe where what is being proposed is capable of being achieved.*
18. How will DfE use the learning from the DBV programme in future decisions and with other government departments? - *We will share learnings in 'real-time' internally as well as with other departments and agencies e.g. DLUHC, HMT, Ofsted, CQC and NHS. Besides the implication for policy development, the delivery partner will also produce a national playbook that will consolidate learnings from the programme to be shared with the wider sector including authorities not in the programme.*
19. How will DfE measure the value of the DBV programme? - *While there will be no monitoring or recoverable costs imposed on participating authorities, DfE will evaluate the impact on selected outcome indicators from publicly available data as well as impact on DSG outturns of participating authorities. The aim of the DBV programme is to help LAs provide effective SEND services, provide affordable SEND provisions and achieve a sustainable in-year deficit. It is anticipated that the action plan proposed by the LA to DfE will incorporate these aims.*
20. Is the aim of improvement within the DBV programme to balance the high needs budget or also to improve outcomes for children and young people? - *The aim of the DBV programme is to improve delivery of SEND services for children and young people and to ensure that this is done so within budget.*

21. Does the DBV programme help LAs tackle their historic deficit or in-year budgets? Can LAs include initiatives in their action plans that help to reduce their deficit? - *Addressing historic deficits is not the key purpose of the DBV programme, rather to support LAs to return to in-year balance whilst delivering high-quality services. Efficiencies that flow from this may allow LAs to release funds to address historic deficits. This may not happen for all LAs though, and a number of LAs that are part of the DBV programme may be invited to join the SV programme next financial year due to the scale of their deficit. LAs are welcome to include initiatives in their action plans that help reduce their historic deficit.*
22. Is there scope or enthusiasm for flexibility within the DBV programme to support innovation? - *Yes. LAs own their action plans and determine what is included or incorporated as long as it supports the achievement of the overall objectives. If there are innovative solutions that an LA wants to incorporate into their action plan, these would be welcomed with enthusiasm.*
23. What is the DfE requirement out of the programme? Will there be any monitoring against an LA's action plan? - *DfE will not formally monitor progress against an LA's action plan. The DBV programme is different to the SV programme in that there will be no contractual agreement in place with intense monitoring, no withholding of funding and no clawback mechanisms. The DBV programme is about support, not intervention, to help LAs get to where they want to be. The action plan will also not be scored by DfE. LAs will agree their plan with support from the delivery partner, SEND and Finance Professional Advisers with buy-in from their stakeholders. DfE will agree with each LA which elements of the action plan will be funded, and it's then the LA's responsibility to implement this.*
24. How will the DBV programme address any of the historic issues with the funding formula which may be uncovered as part of the diagnostic phase? - *The focus of the DBV programme is financial sustainability and effective practice. DfE acknowledges there is a debate to be had surrounding funding formula which can be raised through the Steering Group. Any evidence and/or issues about funding emerging from the diagnostic phase will be fed back to the Funding Policy Unit.*
25. In terms of current deficit and statutory override, is the override now not going to be applicable to LAs or will this be extended? - *The current position is that the override will still run out at the end of 2022-23. No extension has been announced. DfE is liaising with DLUHC and will revert if there is any change to the current position.*

Funding for DBV

26. What is the total funding for the programme and the breakdown for local government? Will it be a formulaic distribution of funds? - *There is £85 million funding available for DBV. The funding will not be*

distributed on a formulaic basis. The intention is that LAs will not need to bid for funding and compete against other LAs on the programme. Each LA's funding allocation will be determined by the action plan produced during the diagnostic phase up to an upper limit. Depending on the action plans, some LAs will get more and some will get less.

27. Given the phased roll out of the programme, how will the DfE ensure that there is enough funding for each LA and that the funding for the programme will be evenly and fairly spread? Will the LAs in the first group get a bigger proportion of the funding? - *While DfE will receive some action plans sooner than others, the funding will not be distributed on a first come, first served basis. Nor will the funding be distributed on a formulaic basis. DfE will adopt an approach that ensures all LAs will have some significant funds reserved to support their action plans. DfE are currently developing this approach. If an LA submits an early action plan that is expensive, there will be an internal limit around how much money can be distributed to that LA to ensure every LA has the opportunity to have a significant number of their reforms funded.*
28. What is the likelihood of the £85 million budget for the DBV programme being increased? - *The budget is not likely to be increased and the programme is not intended to eradicate deficits.*
29. Is the funding an LA receives proportionate to the size of the LA's debt? - *Funding will be distributed to LAs based on the proposals in their action plan.*
30. Is the £85m available for the DBV programme for revenue and capital or just revenue? - *The funding for LAs for the activities detailed in their action plans is for revenue only. DfE appreciates that a lot of your action plans will have capital implications, however extensive amounts of capital are being made available through the capital allocations process so LAs may want to consider this when producing their action plans.*
31. What are the conditions of fund accountability once phase 2 is complete? - *Once distributed, the funds will be LA owned and not recoverable by DfE though we expect and trust that funds will go towards the implementation of proposed action plans. DBV is constructed around the needs of authorities and based on the LA developed (and owned) action plan that the LA believes in and therefore committed to implement.*
32. When will funding be given to LAs following the submission of their action plans? - *As soon as possible. DfE is currently developing a process that will ensure speedy pay-out which will be communicated to LAs.*
33. Is there a level of expectation from the DfE that LAs will match fund the funding that they receive through the programme? - *There is no*

mechanism in the programme that proposes or expects match funding. LAs will propose an action plan to the DfE who will in turn provide funding for elements of this action plan. Ordinarily, LAs are expected to fund their own improvement and/or financial recovery plans. DfE hopes to alleviate pressure for participating LAs by funding key elements of their action plans.

Programme structure and delivery

34. Can LAs work together as part of DBV? – Yes.
35. What will happen during the diagnostic phase? - *The DfE anticipate that the diagnostic phase will incorporate data analysis and assurance, a stocktake of where the LA is and what needs to be done, key stakeholder engagement and construction of options for LAs to consider as part of action plans that will be proposed back to the DfE. A delivery partner and Advisers will support LAs through this phase. A small grant will be provided at the start to support LAs with the compilation of relevant, good quality datasets. The delivery partner and Advisers will help LAs to understand their data and take stock of where they are – where are you currently, what are your needs and pressures and where do you need to go? They will also support with engaging key stakeholders and the production of an action plan linked to a quality assured DSG management plan that is proposed back to the DfE. This action plan will demonstrate what the LA wants to put in place to address their issues and needs and detail how much funding the LA would require to implement this. The exact components of each LA's diagnostic phase will be determined by where they are in their improvement journey and what they already have in place. Each LA will be in the driving seat regarding what they need. The delivery partner will engage with the LA on this and flex its support to be responsive.*
36. What data sets will be needed from LAs for the diagnostic phase? - *The diagnostic phase will be largely based on the Designated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan. A small grant will be given to LAs joining the programme to organise their data sets. The LA will have responsibility for deciding how to resource this activity. This data support is being offered to ensure the management plan is credible.*
37. What will the reporting requirements be for the duration of the programme? Will there be monitoring from DfE against an LA's action plan? - *There will be no formal reporting requirements or monitoring specific to this programme. The DfE will continue to track standard existing data returns to evaluate if the programme and resulting action plans are working. Advisers and regional teams will continue to provide the usual support and check-ins throughout the programme.*
38. If an LA has local partners, peers or consultants that they already work with, can they be included as part of the team for the diagnostic phase? – *Yes. The delivery partner will have a mechanism to take these individuals on as part of the project team to provide the additional*

capacity needed to support LAs.

39. Will support from the delivery partner in terms of engaging with these groups be front and foremost, so that they are aware of the programme and what it means? Some LAs have experienced judicial reviews in the past when implementing processes to improve their deficits. - *DfE have considered this experience of judicial reviews in setting the 6-month timeframe for the diagnostic phase. The LA will need to determine and share with the delivery partner and Advisers which key stakeholders they should support you in facilitating consultation and engagement with so they help coordinate the stakeholders' buy in before producing the action plan.*
40. What will be the time demand on individuals in the LA to work with the delivery partner and SEND advisers as part of the diagnostic phase? – *This will be determined during the stocktake. The delivery partner and its teams will provide additional capacity and work around existing activities and resource pressures however there will need to be some engagement from the LA as they won't know your area as well as you do. This should lead to a bespoke, LA-owned action plan through a shared team effort. The aim of this phase is to provide tangible support and not create additional burdens.*
41. What happens after the diagnostic phase of the DBV programme? - *The LA presents its action plan to DfE who will agree elements of the plan to fund. This will be provided through Section 14 grants which will enable the LA begin the implementation phase.*
42. Will a delivery partner be made available to work with LAs as part of the implementation phase? - *The delivery partner will support the LAs in transitioning to implementation. While acknowledging some LAs will need more support than others, the delivery partner will be expected to transition off shortly after implementation commences. In relevant cases, DfE may consider what additional support to provide where an LA needs support with implementation.*

Learning from good practice

43. Is there a framework of good practice that can be used by LAs on the DBV programme? Is there learning from the Safety Valve (SV) programme that will be fed back into DBV? - *DfE published a reflective commentary last year that is currently being updated. A guidance with case studies of effective practice will be published in June 2022 and shared with all LAs. The DBV and SV teams within the DfE are working very closely together so the learning from one programme will be fed into the other. The delivery partner will also have a responsibility to share any lessons learnt or best practice in real time, be this from the SV programme, DBV programme or other LAs.*
44. Will there be an opportunity to collaborate between authorities who are part of the programme but also more broadly? - *DfE encourages*

collaboration between LAs to aid effective delivery of the programme however support and funding will only be made available to participating authorities.

Stakeholder engagement

45. Are there any resources that outline the programme and its intentions that could be used to make stakeholders such as the schools forum aware of the support that is soon to be made available? - *These are being prepared and will be shared as part of the programme launch.*
46. Will the DfE be talking to DHSC to make them aware of this programme, and will it be fed down to local levels? Is there an expectation of a system approach to this programme with NHS and ICSs as we work as a local area? - *DfE are speaking to DHSC and the national coordinator for NHSE so that they are aware of the DBV programme and encourage local participation. NHSE will have a national representative on the Sector Steering group. The SEND Professional Advisers have established close working relationships with the regional NHSE advisers and they will be bringing them in as part of the diagnostic phase for the local area action plans.*

Delivery partner and SEND Professional and Financial Advisers

47. Who are the SEND Professional and Finance Advisers and what will their role be? - *The SEND Professional Advisers are SEND specialists that have been supporting the sector on behalf of the DfE for many years and are individuals that many LAs will already be working with. They also support the LAs in the safety valve programme and will bring shared learnings and much value. The SEND Finance Advisers will be provided by the delivery partner – these will be chartered accountants who are experienced in the field, such as former S151 officers or previous heads of education finance.*
48. Can LAs be part of the decision-making process around the delivery partners and SEND Advisers that will support them? – *We were compelled to undertake an independent procurement process (this involved a stage 2 panel interview involving an Authority Chief Exec) for the delivery partner which has now been completed. However, to provide LAs with greater choice and flexibility, there will be a mechanism for LAs to recommend local sub-contractors or consultants that understand their local areas and the delivery partner will take them on. Should LAs have specific concerns regarding their SEND Advisers or delivery partner, they are welcome to flag that in confidence via the DBV mailbox and we will work with them to address the issues or where necessary re-assign Advisers.*

Steering group

49. How will the Steering Group membership be decided? What is the role of the Steering Group and how can the LAs participating in the

programme be involved? What mechanisms will be used for Steering Group feedback to the DfE? - *Following extensive consultation, the following structure is proposed for the Sector Steering Group (SSG): The SSG will be a nine-member body that will provide sector-led oversight and assurance over the programme and its progress ensuring a channel of feedback for participating LAs and the wider sector. It is proposed the SSG meet fortnightly for the first three months of the programme and then monthly thereafter. The delivery partner will provide regular reports to the SSG and attend all meetings to discuss programme progress and emerging issues/learnings. Proposed membership is as follows:*

- *Chair – Chief Executive of one of the 55 DBV authorities*
- *Representative from SOLACE*
- *Representative from ADCS*
- *Representative from LGA*
- *Representative from Society of County Treasurers*
- *Representative from NHS England*
- *Representative from Academies*
- *Representative from NNPCF*
- *DfE representative*

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do send them to DBV.PROGRAMMESUPPORT@education.gov.uk