

## Safety Valve Monitoring – Kent County Council

Date Submitted	15 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	
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### Safety Valve: Summary of Kent's Progress as at Quarter 1 2023/24

Kent CC is committed to reducing its High Needs DSG deficit to the levels set out in the Table below. Kent plans to achieve this by taking service measures which will deliver better value from the available resources. These measures and current progress with their implementation, are described in detail below.

Year	Forecast accumulated DSG Deficit Profile at year end £m (Per SV Agreement Letter October 2022)	Forecast accumulated DSG Deficit Profile at year end £m (Per Q1 Monitor 30 June 2023)	Variance	RAG
22-23	129.7	117.5	-12.0	GREEN
23-24	156.1	148.8	-7.7	GREEN
24-25	170.5	164.5	-6.0	GREEN
25-26	174.2	170.2	-4.0	GREEN
26-27	163.1	161.1	-2.0	GREEN
27-28	140.0	140.0	0	GREEN

The overall accumulated DSG deficit position for 2022-23 showed a £12m total improved position compared to the forecast position in the Safety Valve agreement.

The Safety Valve profile estimated the in-year High Needs Deficit to be around +£45m for 2022-23, this included a £2.7m contingency. The year end position on the High Needs Block (HNB) was +£38m, a £7m improvement. Kent is therefore delivering on its key target to reduce the High Needs deficit

The position on both the Early Years (EYB) and Schools Blocks (SB) were also better than included in the original profile (£4.3m accumulated surplus) resulting in an accumulated deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant as at 31st

March 2023 of £118m prior to the DFE contributions (compared to an initial estimate in the Safety Valve of £130m).

The main reasons for the £7m improvement on the HNB are: The 2022-23 forecast included a £2.7m contingency which was not required, along with over £0.5m of one-off underspend resulting from a review of prior year creditors that have not been needed. The remaining £4.5m lower spend was predominately due to lower activity & cost across independent, tuition services and direct payments. The average cost of special school placements was also lower. However, there are concerns this may be a one-off benefit due to significant extra costs schools are facing, particularly in relation to the recruitment of teaching assistants (please see emerging risks). We also saw a higher rise in the number of mainstream top-up payments. These patterns are also reflected in our activity data.

Both the savings profiles and underlying forecasts are being updated to reflect the latest information and will be included in the September monitoring return. However, it is recognised that whilst the year end position is positive, the plan is reliant on a significant future cost avoidance/saving programme, along with unknown future requirements on both the Early Years and Schools Block. Therefore, plans have been updated, assuming the surpluses on both the EYB & SB will be required in future years and will not reduce the deficit in the longer term. The HNB underspend has also been added to future years' contingency. Therefore, the accumulated DSG deficit as at March 2028 remains unchanged at £140m. This position will be kept under review.

We are also working towards linking savings to specific projects where it is possible and reasonable to do so. This is dependent on the maturity of projects and the ability to separate individual impacts; we are recruiting further finance/analyst support to achieve this goal. An update on progress will be provided in the September monitoring. We recognise that many of the projects and actions outlined in detail below are only just being implemented and that the full financial impact will not be reflected until future years. The original Safety Valve profile was built on this basis, recognising that although there may be a few "quick wins", the majority of change will be progressive to avoid destabilising the whole SEN system. Having said this, the outturn for 2022-23 does indicate a positive start that we will continue to build on and early forecasts suggest we are on track to meet our 2023-24 aims.

Our EHCP data for the January 23 SEN2 submission has recently been published and shows we are in line with our initial estimates. When comparing our forecast for the number of EHCPs for January 2023 to actuals, we had an overall error rate of 1.5% with 297 fewer EHCPs than initial forecast, was across all age groups except in our under 5-year olds. During 2021, we saw a spike in the number of EHCPs for children aged under 5. We had hoped this would be a one-year effect of COVID. However, our rate of new EHCPs in this age did not reduce during 2022. We have highlighted this as an area of focus below.

	Jan	2023	2023	2023
		Jan 23 Safety Valve Plan	Actual	Variance to Plan
Under 5		531	676	145
Age 5 to 10		5,688	5,570	-118
Age 11 to 15		6,951	6,802	-149
Age 16 to 19		3,938	3,820	-118
Age 20 to 25		2,120	2,063	-57
<b>Total number of EHCPs by Age Group</b>		<b>19,228</b>	<b>18,931</b>	<b>-297</b>

## The Report in Detail

Agreement Condition #1	Assurance Level		
Implement a countywide approach to 'Inclusion Education', to further build capacity in mainstream schools to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), thus increasing the proportion of children successfully supported in mainstream education and reducing dependence on specialist provision;			
	Q1	Q2	Q3
	Green	RAG	RAG
<p>Much of the work we have undertaken including several projects, fall within this condition, however we have highlighted the main progress here and included other information where it more easily reflects the cost avoidance savings area under other criteria. School engagement and take up of SEND specific training is critical to the success of the County Approaches to Inclusion Education (CATIE). The first phase of activity to improve SEND inclusion capacity in schools was to co-construct the Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education Delivery Plan, the Mainstream Core Standards, the Transitions Charter and to commission the four big CPD programmes of Inclusive Leaders, NurtureUK, Supported Employment and Mainstream Core Standards, are all progressing at pace.</p> <p>The Children, Young People &amp; Education (CYPE) Directorate Management Team (DMT) approved the revised CATIE document, to be submitted for Cabinet approval as a strategy for inclusion on 29th March 2023. Children's and Young People's Cabinet committee approved the policy on 16th May 2023. The CATIE dashboard workstream is underway and has developed a suite of reports on indicators of inclusion at a District level. This is due to be released to schools during June, and the school level reporting is being refined. A survey to understand how/why users currently use the district-level CATIE dashboard and what they hope to get out of an extended/redeveloped version will follow.</p> <p>The Enquiries HUB is taking live calls from existing area numbers to start</p>			

process mapping, which will enable us to better understand call frequency and information requested in order to improve the service offered to callers.

Inclusion Leadership Service participation is below target at 56%, but there is positive potential to align with the locality model resources and this will enable the schools to work collaboratively locally to distribute resources more effectively.

Mainstream Core Standards training for teachers and governors KPIs are on track.

The Effective Kent Project, which supports low level interventions and whole class / school approaches to support quality first teaching and inclusive practice, is coming to an end, with the project set to formally close in July 2023. The team is working on sustainability plans to ensure that approaches and expertise remain available to schools after the formal project end. The full launch of a governor e-learning tool is underway, and KPIs are on track, governance is mapped, and an options appraisal drafted. This will ensure the mainstream core standards and culture change needed to be more inclusive is embedded.

Autism Education Trust licence has been finalised, approved and signed off. This will enable us to upskill schools in supporting those with autism in mainstream settings whilst also giving them a framework to use a consistent approach across all schools to promote inclusion. This will help to support the aim for more children to be succeed in mainstream schools and increase parental confidence. The savings relating to this form part of the wider CATIE impacts.

The percentage of school age young people with an EHCP who are in a mainstream setting for May is currently 40.7% showing a slight increase from 40.3% last month, which needs to increase significantly to meet our overall financial targets.

Agreement Condition #2	Assurance Level		
Introduce a robust Special Educational Need (SEN) offer for early years, following a review, which explores alternatives to special school admission before Key Stage 2 (KS2), SEN redesign and implementation of County Approaches to Inclusive Education (CATIE) to support consistent mainstream offer, including leadership development programmes, peer review and core training offer			
	Q1	Q2	Q3
	Amber	RAG	RAG

Data from 2022 shows the number of new 0-4-year-olds with an EHCP has increased each year since 2018 and the forecast is modelling that around 44% of these are going into special schools. These 0–4-year-olds are also accounting for 20% of the forecasted newly issued EHCPs. This is a significant cause for concern and the steps we are taking to address this are multi-faceted. We have initially asked the DfE to identify authorities that have been successful with interventions that have reduced numbers of EHCPs at the early years stage and we will be learning from this and implementing these strategies within our own work over the coming months. In addition, we are working with lived experienced advisers to seek their feedback and engaging our research partner to identify why this is happening.

In response to this growing demand and wider pressures on early years providers, a review of early years within CYPE was undertaken to understand the current early years position in Kent and identify best practices and areas for improvement. The review has been completed in three strands of activity: undertaking a review of the Early Years education provision across Kent, identifying and undertaking deep dives, and making recommendations that will feed into a countywide strategy for Early Years Education and Childcare.

The stakeholder engagement report and phase one report have been completed, and key findings suggest that the early years sector is under pressure, due to increasing demand for support, complexity of need, and retention and recruitment issues. We believe the findings from the deep dives will identify what is causing the increase in demand.

The review has identified key areas for in-depth analysis, including pathways, SEN Inclusion Fund (SENIF) and Local Inclusion Forum Teams (LIFT) processes, school readiness, sufficiency planning, and specialist intervention nurseries. Members of the reference group have aligned to each of these and work is now underway to implement this work. This will have a positive impact on cost avoidance if pace can be maintained.

Kent operates a number of observation & assessment specialist nurseries located within Special Schools. The Year R pilot projects explored different models to locate this activity in mainstream schools, rather than a special school environment. The interim evaluation has been shared and reference groups continue for the EY review work to progress into the next phase, the pilots are not being continued as they have not had the necessary impact. Further final evaluation will identify whether these pilots were not set up in a manner that allows impact to be measured easily, or if the impact was negligible and we will ensure learning from this is integrated into any future SV pilots.

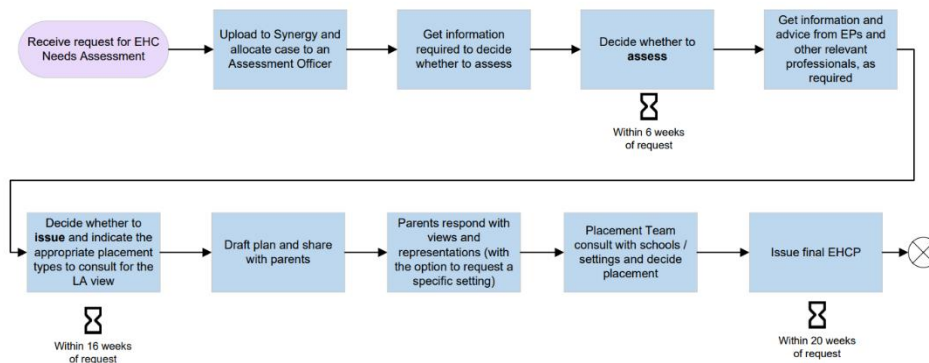
Considering the forecast is showing over 200 per year may be entering special schools, work needs to progress at pace to implement some specific and targeted intervention work and identify additional options to reduce cost, whilst

maintaining high levels of support.

Planning has commenced with commissioners for each of the deep dive areas, along with the research partner to discuss evidence-based research support, which will need resource from within the service to be impactful. Our next steps are completing the deep dives in July 2023, with a full report published in September 2023. This will mean we are likely to have a number of recommendations which will look at the system wide practice and resourcing needs across the whole EY phase.

Agreement Condition #3	Assurance Level		
Review the system of Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments and annual reviews to ensure robustness, transparency, and consistency, through use of consistent criteria and practice framework			
	Q1	Q2	Q3
	Green	RAG	RAG

EHCP assessment process shown diagrammatically.



The MI & Systems SEND change workstream has made progress in agreeing processes and implementing a power app process for placement searches (a power app is Microsoft software used to build a low code application programme with a more bespoke way of interacting with a data base, its advantage is that it can be quickly built by someone with limited knowledge and information is stored securely within Microsoft environment).

The SEN redesign implementation phase has started with significant recruitment of SEN officers and new managers in post, with recruitment to remaining vacant posts in train, All Assessment and Placement managers posts are now filled or recruited to. There were 25% vacancies across the SEN service in April 2023. We are taking the following steps to manage the recruitment process: development of a power app to consolidate all vacancies and progress of the recruitment process for all posts on one place, refocussing on processes and adverts, broadening the application pool both demographically and in choice of channels used, such as schools' network and improving the training offer for

new recruits.

The team was preparing for case transfers/reallocation and go-live date for assessment, placement, and case holding teams on April 17th and workflow/process mapping work is nearing conclusion and implementation of improvements has been undertaken with the final panel going live on 17<sup>th</sup> May.

The Annual Review Backlog Team has prioritised cases. Of 492 Annual Reviews completed in May 2023, 100 (20.3%) were ceased. Whilst this work is progressing slower than anticipated, the Team are rewriting almost all current plans to ensure they are of a higher quality and include all amendment requests on the new template.

An introductory session for SENCOs/aspiring SENCOs from one large academy trust was attended by 14 staff with a further 2 interested in supporting this annual review work within their schools. This will enhance the capacity of KCC staff and also further develop the participants own ability to contribute to EHCPs.

However, the percentage of Annual Reviews waiting over 12 months remains high at 65.3% due to vacancies in the permanent case work teams, resulting in more reviews falling into the 12 months plus category, than can be cleared by the backlog team. The service is gathering information and data to produce a business case to increase staffing capacity in writing, reviewing, amending, or ceasing EHCPs. This is obviously an area where a lot of hard work is going in.

The decision-making process for EHC Needs Assessments (EHCNA) has been signed off, and the update to 'Assessment Decisions Form' (with criteria) has been rolled out. Next stages will focus on further digitisation, with Panels working group expected to use an app to record and track placement searches once. The process of digitizing Word forms onto Synergy Gateway has also started which will promote efficiency and streamline the overall process for all involved.

Customer experience within EHCNAs has been improved, with 3 sessions held with 'lived experience' advisers (parents of children with SEND) to inform the proposed working practices to improve communication.

A future-state process map has been developed to support process Improvements for Annual Reviews and is currently being reviewed by key stakeholders and adjusted accordingly. An online single-point-of-contact form for schools/settings is being built, and the updated ARAMs form (our internal annual review form) is drafted.

The SEND handbook's design has been produced and focus groups used to ensure it meets staff need. A draft version of the Handbook has been developed and is being reviewed by stakeholders ahead of publication during the Autumn term. The recruitment drive for EHC case officers has been relatively successful and new processes are mapped within teams, alongside the roll out of training.

The newly created quality assurance and moderation team has been creating a framework, establishing the processes and identifying the moderators and

auditors. Difficulties have stemmed from compliance within the service –resulting in a delay to launching the pilot moderation work which is now due for completion in July.

Kent is working from a baseline of very high number of initial requests for needs assessments. In 2021 (the latest comparable data available) Kent had 114.4 requests per 10,000 of 0 to 18-year-olds compared to 75.3 in England. As well as high volume of requests to assess compared to national and other local authorities, a higher percentage of initial requests are refused than national. In May 2023, 37.4% of initial request did not go on to an assessment in Kent and following assessment the decision not to issue an EHC Plan was between 16% and 29% in ten out of the last 12 months which is higher than other LAs. The number of needs assessments currently underway has increased to the highest point in three years to almost 2,100 open cases and EHCPs issued within timescales has decreased in May 2023, after high numbers of requests for assessment and high number of open cases demonstrating the urgency with which the revised processes and systems work needs to be implemented in full. The drop in performance is not unexpected. We recognised the risk of moving to the new structure and introduction of new processes and systems would take time to embed.

Agreement Condition #4	Assurance Level
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Implement models of reintegration of children from special/independent schools to mainstream where needs have been met;

	Q1	Q2	Q3
	Red	RAG	RAG

Work is yet to progress on this condition, partly due to attention being prioritised upon other more significant areas. There are currently a very small number of CYP reintegrated back into mainstream settings. However, as other project work progresses, particularly in the post 16 workstreams initially, we expect to see an increase in numbers, the focus will transfer across to this as we move forward and work with local colleges to identify pathways from out of county and independent placements has started.

The programme team have been working with the service to identify future projects that could identify models of reintegration. This is likely to involve some research work and study of other LAs who have successfully reintegrated large numbers of CYP across a broad age range, rather than just the post 16 work currently being undertaken.

As work progresses on the sufficiency plan and special school review, it is anticipated that the satellites will help to progress this area of work within all age



groups too.

Management information in this area is still in development. However, only one young person with an EHCP has moved from independent schools to mainstream in May 2023, with 7 moving from mainstream to special schools and 11 moving to independent schools. As work continues, the number and proportion moving into mainstream schools following an Annual Review will be monitored monthly.

Agreement Condition #5	Assurance Level		
Develop a robust Post-16 offer across the county with clear pathways to independence for children with SEN, through increased Post-16 opportunities for preparing for adulthood			
	Q1	Q2	Q3
	Green	RAG	RAG

The Pathways for All report published in March 2022 made recommendations for improving outcomes, raising young people's aspirations through better Careers Education, Information, Advice, and Guidance (CEIAG), implementing an 'area offer' of 16+ provision, improving provision below Level 2, and supporting learners' mental health.

The implementation of these recommendations will have a positive impact on vulnerable groups of learners, including young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The recommendations aim to establish a comprehensive data benchmarking programme, encourage the adoption of a life skills curriculum, develop a model CEIAG curriculum, and support young people to achieve in post-16 employment or further education.

Additionally, there is a need to construct a comprehensive local post-16 'area offer' that combines academic and vocational programmes to replace discontinued qualifications and improve provision below Level 2. It also highlighted a need to focus on supporting learners' mental health by drawing up and implementing a clear county-wide framework for emotional wellbeing approaches and services, and identifying and sharing the best evidence-based teaching practices that support learning in a mental health-friendly way for all students.

The pathways to Independence sufficiency planning project will gather evidence of local post 19 pathways and this learning shared with our wider stakeholders.

The supported employment offer for mainstream schools has not had the reach anticipated with only 25% of the target of 100 schools enrolled. With low take up by schools we are working to realign this project to meet the needs of a broader

range of young people.

The percentage of young people year 12-14 with an EHCP who are in mainstream provision (including FE colleges) is 41.4% which shows a gradual increase over the past 12 months from 39.5% in July 2022.

Agreement Condition #6

Assurance Level

Develop the Transition Charter to increase parental confidence in Kent's provision. This involves working with schools to enable them to articulate the provision pathways for parents clearly and provide support to both children and parents at key transition points;

Q1

Q2

Q3

Green

RAG

RAG

A workshop has taken place to merge statutory guidelines and framework into the transitions charter. This will form one document, which be our transition guidance for Kent. The delay in EY review is slowing this work but there has been agreement that the same guidance should stand for every phase.

We have past the statutory deadline for phase transfer 2023 for all stages and a commissioning exercise for children without placements is underway and children not placed through the independent sector DPS framework will then go back to area teams to find placement: In May there were 90 children still to find placements for and 60 in Yr6-7 in the mainstream settings that need placements. Work is ongoing to streamline consultation and placement processes in the independent sector, where no other options are available. Whilst improvements have been made in many areas this year, further work is already underway to develop this into phase transfer 2024.

Kent PACT has approved the Mainstream Core Standards for Parent & Family Engagement Award, along with training for parents. These standards will be shared with 10 volunteer schools, who will also participate in the program, but progress is paused whilst Kent PACT establish themselves under a different leadership team.

A communications and engagement strategy has been presented to the Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board, receiving endorsement for an 8-week completion period. The strategy will now be shared with education sector representatives, the Youth Participation Manager, and the NHS for input. The final strategy was presented and agreed at the Board in June.

Agreement Condition #7	Assurance Level		
<p>Ensure there is sufficient and consistent capacity across the county to support children with severe and complex needs in their local area where possible. This includes recruitment of temporary posts to support sufficiency planning, reviewing the use of Specialist Resource Provision (SRP) and reviewing the specialist continuum to ensure only the most severe and complex needs are supported in special schools</p>			
	Q1	Q2	Q3
	Amber	RAG	RAG
<p>Special schools are showing an occupancy of between 95%-118% for all but 3 schools which are lower and SRPs an occupancy of between 50% and 150% for all but 2 schools which are lower. Kent's application via the DfE Special Schools Safety Valve Capital Programme has been successful for 2 of the 3 new special schools requested.</p> <p>In May, several important initiatives and projects were underway. The School Resource Directory and has made significant progress, with the recruitment process for the coordinator position complete with an offer made.</p> <p>Further research and data analysis is being conducted to understand the current provision for children and young people with EHCPs across Kent within the SEN Sufficiency Plan work. This includes supporting project work for the Special School and SRP reviews. The focus is on understanding the criteria for state-funded special school designation, SRP commissioning, EHCP data, and the capacity of Kent provision for school and post-16 SEND learners.</p> <p>A draft SLA for SRPs has been agreed by reference group and the draft report is now with the legal team for comment. This will facilitate and ensure the expected outcomes are clear and KCC can monitor, challenge and support in order to achieve these outcomes.</p> <p>The Review of Special Schools has begun but progress has been slowed due to the recruitment of the independent external consultancy firm, whilst the initial firm is being replaced. A survey has been circulated to gather information on current provision, finances, and issues. The stakeholder reference group has been expanded to include at least four special school Headteachers. Stakeholder focus group meetings and analysis sessions, with both Headteachers &amp; Governors, were held in late April and May to delve into the information needed to support completion of the exploration stage (initial stage of the review). Timelines are currently being revised following delays,</p> <p>The NMISS Dynamic Purchasing System is undergoing important developments. A contract variation and an Access Agreement for Medway are currently being reviewed with legal support. The evaluation of five new schools has been completed, and a draft award report is awaiting finalisation and</p>			

approval. There are ongoing discussions with SEND colleagues to establish a group of staff who can evaluate tender responses, ensuring sufficient capacity to meet contractual deadlines. The commissioning process will also include a refresh of evaluator training to clarify the evaluation process. By undertaking this work we will ensure consistency and standardisation, it saves time within the moderation and ensures the evaluation process is robust. The purpose of the introducing the DPS is to improve relationships with the market and support future market development. This will help to ensure the costs of independent provision are more in line with the outcomes we are trying to achieve with the sector.

Progress has been made to review and discuss current Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) within the Internal Tuition work and their measurement with The Education Programme (internal service commissioned to provide SEN home tuition). The aim is to ensure that KPIs accurately reflect the service being delivered and measure the activities that are important. Any necessary adjustments to the Service Level Agreement (SLA) will be made collaboratively.

The Education Programme continues its recruitment efforts to increase capacity. However, some challenges remain, such as staff departures and the need to prioritize resources for the development of the My Ed Virtual Learning Platform. It is recognised further work is needed to ensure appropriate processes and responsibilities within SEN to guide children and young people placed in tuition towards suitable onward destinations. Additionally, efforts are being made to identify wider services that can support families and facilitate engagement for children and young people who are not effectively engaging with tuition.

A Call to Competition has been published for externally commissioned tuition (where the Education Programme is not able to provide appropriate provision) and is open until June 2, 2023. Two market engagement events have taken place, receiving generally positive feedback from suppliers. Further sessions are planned and the scheduling of evaluations. There is a significant amount of progress in this area, and we would regard it as a success for quarter one.

In the SEN therapies project EHCP Section F Integrated Therapy review meetings have taken place with the Senior Management Team (SMT) member to evaluate the synchronies within the SEND service and SEND Therapies team remits. Discussions have focused on refreshing and redesigning the specialist services component of SEND to overcome the challenges of duplication between teams.

Agreement Condition #8	Assurance Level		
Develop a school/area-led approach to commissioning of SEN support services (Locality Based Resources), to better respond to the needs of children and young people with SEND			
	Q1	Q2	Q3

	Green	RAG	RAG
<p>A group of Headteachers have taken part in a task &amp; finish group to explore the potential of a locality-based resource cluster model and key principles for development. The cluster model approach was agreed in principle with the reference group, who also favoured full implementation rather than piloting first. Next steps were also agreed including governance and extra resources necessary to facilitate a system wide change. The publication of the Government SEND/AP improvement plan on 2nd March, has also resulted in proposals to schools needing to be revisited and modified to take in account the Governments direction of travel in relation to “bandings/tariffs” and Local Inclusion Plans. The plan is to consult on a new model for administering High Needs Funding and use of Locality Based resources during the Autumn Term in preparation for roll out during 2024.</p> <p>In the meantime, a review has taken place on the amount of funding paid to mainstream schools towards the first £6k of additional support. This resulted in a proposal, endorsed by the Schools Funding Forum (SFF) to increase the threshold to access this funding. This is anticipated to result in a saving of around £2m in 2023-24. Moving forward the SFF have agreed this threshold should also be reviewed on an annual basis and set in line with reference to an agreed funding pot. It is acknowledged there are risks with this approach: reducing funding to mainstream schools at a time when we are asking for schools to support more children with EHCPs. However, this is part of recognising there are more children with SEN in the system and the definition of having “significant” numbers of children with SEN has changed.</p> <p>The review of the Local Inclusion Forum Team Executive TOR (Terms of Reference) has been suspended as a reassessment of the LIFT strategy is required once the nature of locality working and High Needs Funding for mainstream is completed.</p> <p>The final draft of the Kent PACT MoU is currently being discussed and agreed upon in key meetings within KCC (Kent County Council) and ICB (Integrated Care Board). Discussions are ongoing with Kent PACT following the change in Trustees and Operational Management. We are awaiting a formal Position Statement, Short Term Plan, Business Plan and final agreed MoU to be sent to KCC &amp; ICB and we are confident that new Trustees will work with us to improve the relationship between KCC, ICB &amp; Kent PACT and Parent/Carer Groups across Kent. The MoU is however designed to be applicable to any organization delivering the Parent Carer Forum for Kent.</p>			
Agreement Condition #9	Assurance Level		
Continue working closely with NHS Kent and Medway to ensure a common understanding of SEND needs, including the drivers behind increases in need, ensuring clarity of clinical assessment and the subsequent funding associated.			

	Q1	Q2	Q3
	Amber	RAG	RAG

Work continues with a more coordinated approach with our NHS partners. We had (March 2023) 16 live cases, of which 7 are tripartite funded and 9 dual funded. The joint funded placement review has strengthened and improved processes and KCC have brought in funding expertise to support uptake of joint funding requests. We are working with the NHS to improve their process including the development of MH and LDA funding pathways. LDA pathway is now functioning well and processing backlog of requests.

Thrive has agreed school networks in a further 5 areas, Gravesend, Dartford, Ashford, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge wells. There is a broader issue of capacity within SEN to support work around off-contract spend. This has not progressed as expected due to other priorities. We will still pursue the issue of off-contract spend (especially regarding therapy spend), but this work has not yet started.

The SEN Therapies qualified providers list (QPL) itself is working as expected, though there is some work within Commissioning to review the administration of the contract and establish processes to make this more efficient given increased number of providers.

Whole school nurture service is progressing well against all key indicators. Following attendance at the SENCO Conference there were new expressions of interest and sign up of schools. There is also further press interest from Kent online in view of the Kent Nurture Programme to support inclusion of pupils who may have fallen behind as a result of the pandemic which will be progressed.

Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) transformation (Balanced System Scheme) – was presented at SEND Enquiries hub induction day to raise awareness of SLCN, Balanced System Framework and the impact of this. We have provided an information session for Inclusive Leaders of Education (trained SENCO/headteachers in Kent) - to ensure awareness of the Balanced System to enhance support for schools, particularly those accessing both development programmes. The Talking-Walk-ins for pre-school age children has launched in Folkestone & Hythe, Head of Therapy service supported with transition plan to move to the infrastructure which allows offer of full Balanced System approach from Sept 2023 this covers Ashford; Folkestone & Hythe; and Dover districts.

There has been the launch of a working group focussed on Mainstream Secondary SLCN targeted provision launched with therapists across NHS SaLT providers/STLS/TEP and ongoing mentor support for schools and settings completing Balanced System Scheme for Schools and Settings accreditation.

Emerging risks:

- Early Years forecast outside anticipated numbers
- Data quality within SEND service needs improvement, work is underway to embed this and improved culture to sustain it
- Capacity of the SEND service to engage with implementation phase of projects is a challenge, focus has been placed upon recruitment to both temporary and permanent posts.
- In-year deficits reported by the majority of our state-funded special schools in recent 3-year budget submissions. Further validation is needed but recruitment and retention of support staff along with up to 10% increase in salary costs of teaching assistants following rises in the National Living Wage have been sighted as major reasons for financial difficulties. Funding rates have increased by up to 4.3% however this may be insufficient in the longer term.
- The impact of only being successful for only 2 of the 3 new special schools requested, via the DFE Special Schools Safety Valve Capital Programme, is still being worked through.

Any support required:

Our Early Years forecast was ambitious in assuming numbers would reduce to pre covid levels within one year, so we would like some support to identify any projects or ideas that can assist us with reducing the number of children entering specialist provision in Reception or KS1. Opportunities to learn from other LAs who have successfully piloted work that has had a positive impact would help us to develop similar workstreams. We have stopped the two current pilots we have been running as they have shown no discernible positive impact on either outcomes for children or cost avoidance.

We are currently analysing the assumptions and causes of our state-funded special schools overspends to identify common themes. We may require the assistance of an experienced special schools SMRA to support identifying opportunities for efficiencies in our special schools.

Key contact details:

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## **Appendices**

DSG Monitoring Template June 2023