



Dedicated Schools Grant 'Safety Valve' Agreement: Wokingham

1. This agreement is between the Department for Education and Wokingham Council, and covers the financial years from 2022-23 to 2028-29.
2. The authority undertakes to reach a positive in-year balance on its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) account by the end of 2028-29 and in each subsequent year. The authority undertakes to control and reduce the cumulative deficit as follows, not including any contribution made by the department through this agreement:

Year	Forecast DSG Deficit Profile at year end¹ £m
2022-23	£16.6m
2023-24	£25.1m
2024-25	£32.1m
2025-26	£36.9m
2026-27	£40.1m
2027-28	£41.1m
2028-29	£20.1m

3. The authority agrees to implement the DSG management plan that it has set out. This includes action to:

¹ This profile includes contributions that the council will make from its own resources to reduce the DSG deficit.

- 3.1. Implement a new Special Educational Needs (SEN) support service to better embed the graduated response within schools, ensuring they have the confidence, intelligence, skills, and tools to provide support at SEN support level; in turn, reducing unnecessary requests for assessment;
- 3.2. Create a fit for purpose outreach offer which enables schools to access quality specialist support and intervention across a range of primary needs to improve outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and reduce the need to apply for a statutory assessment;
- 3.3. Implement an Early Years strategy, ensuring need is identified at the earliest opportunity, with the appropriate levels of support put in place; ultimately leading to fewer requests for assessment and Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for the under 5 age group;
- 3.4. Redesign and improve the local offer, providing information, advice, and guidance in an accessible way and at the earliest opportunity, to minimise unnecessary escalation of need. Improve knowledge of and access to 'Ordinarily Available Provision' (OAP) across all sectors and reduce unnecessary requests for assessment;
- 3.5. Improve reliability of data, accessibility of strategic and operational management information, and increase efficiency through more intuitive systems aligned to key processes;
- 3.6. Provide additional local special school capacity through the implementation of a new school, to meet identified sufficiency needs and reduce reliance on the Independent and Non Maintained Special School (INMSS) sector;
- 3.7. Review and redesign the multi-agency, operational approach to preparation for adulthood planning as well as development of new, varied, and additional Post-16 opportunities to meet need;

- 3.8. Strengthen the approach to commissioning, particularly of INMSS provision, including an enhanced quality assurance and contract monitoring framework, to secure best value for money.
4. The authority also agrees to ongoing monitoring of its performance in fulfilling this agreement. The authority will:
- 4.1. Report tri-annually (as a minimum) in writing to the Department (Funding Policy Unit) on its progress towards implementing the plan as per the conditions set out in paragraphs 2 and 3;
 - 4.2. The monitoring reports should include progress against the conditions of grant and a financial dashboard detailing various metrics relating to demand and cost. DfE will provide a template for this;
 - 4.3. Inform the Department (Funding Policy Unit) of any unforeseen difficulties or impacts of carrying out the agreement, or any significant risks to reaching the agreed financial position as soon as they arise;
 - 4.4. Meet with the Department at any time when the Department deems it necessary to discuss progress towards the agreement.
5. The Department agrees to pay to the authority an additional **£8.04 million** of DSG before the end of the financial year 2022-23. In subsequent financial years, subject to compliance with the conditions set out in paragraph 3, the Department will pay DSG sums as follows. This funding will be provided in instalments and subject to continued satisfactory progress. Subject to full compliance, Wokingham should therefore eliminate their cumulative deficit no later than 2028-29.

Year	The Department agrees to pay to the authority an additional £m of DSG by year end
2022-23	£8.04m
2023-24	£1.72m
2024-25	£1.72m

2025-26	£1.72m
2026-27	£1.72m
2027-28	£1.72m
2028-29	£3.45m

6. The Department has also sent a commission relating to the authority's capital plans for the creation of new places for children and young people with SEND or those requiring Alternative Provision (AP). It is critical that the authority considers its revenue and capital plans holistically. The Department will assess and review proposals against set criteria which have been outlined in the commission. Subject to that assessment, the Department will consider making a capital contribution to these plans in 2023-24 as a top-up to the local authority's High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA), which will be announced in Spring. Progress against delivery of those capital plans should then be integrated into the tri-annual reporting to the Department as part of the monitoring of this agreement.
7. This agreement is subject to review at any time, for example as a result of the following events:
- 7.1. Higher or lower DSG formula funding levels for the authority in future financial years than those the authority has assumed;
 - 7.2. Significant changes to national SEND policy which impact on elements of the plan;
 - 7.3. Insufficient progress being made towards the authority reaching and sustaining an in-year balance on its DSG account as set out in the plan;
 - 7.4. Whether Wokingham is awarded additional capital funding support following the capital application process;
 - 7.5. Whether Wokingham's bid for two free schools is successful.

The review process will include an assessment of the impact of the change in

circumstances.

On behalf of Wokingham Council, signed by:



Susan Parsonage - LA Chief Executive



Graham Ebers - Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer)



Helen Watson - Director of Children's Services

On behalf of the Department for Education, signed by:



Tom Goldman – Deputy Director, Funding Policy Unit