

COUNTY COUNCIL: 10TH DECEMBER 2024

Agenda Item No. 10b) – Motion from Councillor Nethsingha

Proposed by Councillor Boden Seconded by Councillor XXX

Additions in bold and deletions shown in strikethrough

This Council notes that:

- there is currently a combined deficit of £3.2 billion in the High Needs block overspend across councils in England.
- the deficit for Cambridgeshire County Council currently sits at £40.016m at the end of 2023/24 financial year, with the deficits for similar councils such as Norfolk and Devon being £81.513m as at 31 March 2024 (Norfolk) and £115.419m to the end of 2023/24 (Devon).
- the statutory override for these deficits is currently due to expire in 2026.
- the previous government's attempt to tackle this issue through the Safety Valve programme is off track in many many councils, with the deficits continuing to rise.
- the National Audit Office recently issued a report on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and the High Needs Block making clear that there is a need for reform of the entire system.
- **following an assessment by Internal Audit that its audit of the Dedicated Schools Grant Safety Valve had found significant internal data weaknesses, the Council's Audit and Accounts Committee agreed unanimously at its July 2024 meeting to "refer the two essential audit recommendations relating to the Dedicated Schools Grant Safety Valve to the Children and Young People Committee for review as part of the planned Safety Valve report in the Autumn".**
- **Internal Audit has subsequently reported that, until only a couple of months ago, the effects of the national shortcomings of the Safety Valve programme had been exacerbated in Cambridgeshire County Council by the County's unacceptably poor data accuracy relating to the Safety Valve programme, a lack of targets, expected benefits and measurable aims and a consequent failure to monitor and control the County's Safety Valve programme deficit effectively.**

This Council believes that children and families of children with SEND are being failed by the current system, **and have been failed by the County's inability for so long a period to provide accurate data to Government in relation to the Safety Valve programme**, and that this is a problem which needs to be tackled not only by looking at SEND provision in councils, but the whole of the curriculum and system of accountability in mainstream schools **and within the Council** and the health system.

This Council welcomes the government review of the school curriculum and urge:

- those undertaking that review to focus in particular on the needs of children with SEND.
- the government to also consider the relationship between schools, councils and health providers, in particular how the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs) system is functioning, and the need for health partners to work in closer partnership with schools and families to stop young people ending up in crisis.

This Council resolves:

- to ask the Children and Young People Committee to agree on a submission to be sent to the curriculum review, making clear the importance of an appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of SEND pupils in every school.
- that the Executive Director for Children, Education and Families write to all heads of secondary schools in Cambridgeshire asking for details on how they are ensuring their school is able to meet the needs of all pupils, and that if appropriate following on from this a meeting of secondary heads in Cambridgeshire should be convened to examine how we can better support the families of children with SEND.
- that the Children and Young People Committee bring forward a report on how schools and those working with young people feel the CAMHs system is working, and whether there is a need for a review of its role in early intervention.
- that the Children and Young People Committee also contact early years providers and primary schools to gather information on their experience of the SEND system.
- **that the Children and Young People Committee receive, monitor and consider regular updates at all of its meetings as to the continued integrity, accuracy and timeliness of High Needs Block data held by Cambridgeshire County Council and submitted to Government in support of the Safety Valve programme.**