

LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Date of meeting 24 March 2020

Item No 8

Title: Recommendations of the High Needs Block Working Group

Executive Summary

On 5 March 2020, the High Needs Block Working Group considered a number of reports, including:

- High Needs Commissioned Places;
- High Needs Block Funding;
- Developing the Approach and Provision for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities;
- High Needs Block Provision Task and Finish Group Report;
- Embedding System Leadership.

Recommendations

The Forum is asked to:

- a) Note the report from the High Needs Block Working Group held on 5 March 2020;
- b) Ratify the Group's recommendations.

Background

On 5 March 2020, the High Needs Block Working Group considered a number of reports. A summary of the key issues and recommendations arising from the Working Group's considerations of the items are provided in this report.

1. High Needs Commissioned Places

Following comments received in the last Schools Budget setting round, the LA has been reviewing the communication process around commissioned place numbers.

In future budget rounds, the LA intends to write out to HNB schools at the end of the summer term setting out the number of places that it is proposed to commission in the following years budget. This will provide the May census number for special schools and three census average for PRUs figures.

This should provide more certainty and transparency as to the number of places to be commissioned and allow an opportunity for schools to make any representations around any other factors that should be considered in addition to the application of the agreed methodology on an individual case basis.

The Working Group:

- a) **Welcomed the proposed earlier communication process around commissioned places.**

2. High Needs Block Funding

High Needs Block (HNB) Allocations 2020/21

At the Schools Forum on 14 January 2020, decisions and recommendations about the 2020/21 Schools Budget were agreed, which were based on working group recommendations. On 16 January 2020, the County Council's Cabinet formally approved the Schools Budget for 2020/21.

Certain elements of the budget have subsequently received the required ESFA approvals.

Special School and PRU School Budgets were prepared and issued on 26 February 2020, together with the forecast High Needs Block allocations for high needs pupils at mainstream schools.

Other Matters Relating to 2020/21 School Funding

Since the last working group meeting, the DfE have also confirmed other matters relating to school funding arrangements from April 2020. Key issues have included:

Pupil Premium Grant (PPG)

Confirmation has been received from the DfE about the new PPG rates for 2020/21, which are set out below:

- FSM
 - £1,345 per qualifying primary-aged pupil (was £1,320)

- £955 per qualifying secondary-aged pupil (was £935)
- Looked-after and previously looked-after children
 - £2,345 per qualifying pupil (was £2,300)
 - Locally remains £600 per term
- Service premium
 - £310 per qualifying pupil (was £300)

Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) for Maintained Schools

Following a consultation in the autumn term, the DfE have confirmed that the RPA, which currently covers academies, will be extended to allow maintained schools to join with effect from 1 April 2020.

The DfE have indicated that the RPA unit value has been set at £18 per pupil until 31 March 2021 and will then be reviewed for 2021/22. Maintained schools will be able to register via a DfE Sign In from mid-March 2020.

The LCC insurance offer for 2020/21 has already been issued to schools in January 2020.

An initial assessment of the RPA offer by the LCC insurance team has identified that the current insurance cover provided by LCC includes a number of aspects not included in the RPA, for example Motor insurance.

As a reminder, the Insurance Team will repost onto the schools portal the 'Minimum Insurance Requirements for Schools', which schools need to ensure is covered regardless of the provider chosen.

Clarifying ring-fenced DSG Status

In January 2020, the DfE published their response to the consultation on changing the conditions of grant and regulations applying to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), in order to clarify that the DSG is a ring-fenced specific grant separate from the general funding of local authorities. The intention of the government proposals contained in the consultation was to ensure that any deficit an authority may have on its DSG account is expected to be carried forward to the next year's schools budget and does not require to be covered by the authority's general reserves. There are a large number of LAs that are currently operating with DSG deficits, many attributable to the HNB overspends.

The DfE have confirmed that they will introduce their proposals and that these will come into effect for 2019/20 year end.

The county council, in consultation with the Forum, has always tried to manage Schools Budget pressures from within the Dedicated Schools Grant resources available and still maintains a positive DSG reserve, although the level of reserve has reduced considerably in recent years. These revised regulations and conditions of grant for DSG should not therefore have any immediate impact on school funding arrangements in Lancashire.

Financial Transparency

The Government consulted on changes to 'financial transparency' in the autumn term 2019, with the intention to ensure Maintained and Academy schools accountabilities are more closely aligned.

Ministers have not yet finalised their response to the consultation but are likely to go ahead with certain aspects of their proposals, whilst other elements have yet to be decided.

Further information will be provided to schools and the Forum once final decisions are taken by the government.

Early Information about Future Funding Arrangements.

Through various regional and national groups, early information about possible future funding arrangements has been obtained. Information on some key issues relevant to HNB is provided below:

Teachers Pay and Pensions Grants

The DfE are to role the teachers pay and pensions grants into main school funding formulae, possibly from 2020/21.

HNB Formula

In the Short term, the DfE have indicated that they are continuing to look at options that recognise High Needs Block budget pressures.

For the medium term, there is an intention to review overall High Needs formula. DfE may issue a public consultation in spring.

The Working Group:

- a) **Noted the information provided.**

3. Developing the Approach and Provision for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

On 16 January 2020, the LCC Cabinet received a report titled 'Developing the Approach and Provision for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities'.

The report set out a series of proposals to enable the county council to fulfil its responsibilities for ensuring the sufficiency of provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities over the next five years. A link to the full report was provided for the Working Group.

Following consideration of the information provided, the Cabinet approved the following resolutions

Resolved: That

- the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Sufficiency Strategy 2019-2024 set out at in the report, which sets out a range of medium and longer term actions be approved for wider consultation.

- the commencement of feasibility design work for two proposed capital projects for Broadfield Specialist College, Oswaldtwistle, and Sir Tom Finney Community High School, Preston be approved.
- the commencement of an informal process for seeking expressions of interest from mainstream schools to support the development of special educational needs units in localities in need of additionally resourced mainstream provision be approved.
- the commencement of feasibility design work for the projects at Stepping Stones Short Stay School and on The Haven site in line with the statutory processes be approved.
- the proposals identified within these recommendations be implemented where consistent with the priorities with the August Cabinet report and the Sufficiency Strategy.

The role of the Forum and the HNB Working Group were formally set out in the strategy in the Funding and Governance section.

Members were already aware of many of the key challenges identified in the strategy, particularly those relating to financial pressures on the High Needs Block, and the Forum have been consulted on a number of the proposals being developed to meet these financial challenges and enable the county council to deliver the strategy's vision and principles.

Members considered the report and the Forum implications.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the report;**
- b) Welcomed the formal strategy agreed by Cabinet and the identified links to the Schools Forum and High Needs Block Working Group which are set out in the Funding and Governance section of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Sufficiency Strategy 2019 – 2024;**
- c) Welcomed the additional places being offered in the Lancaster area, but also asked that the use of the former Skerton High School site be considered as a possible location to provide additional high needs places in the area;**
- d) Asked what plans the county council may have for the Broadfield School site, if the school moved into the former Hameldon School premises;**
- e) Enquired about the responses from mainstream schools to the request for expressions of interest to develop special educational needs units and asked for any further information around the funding of such units;**
- f) Acknowledged that Inclusion Service colleagues were tied up with preparations for the OfSTED inspection so were unable to attend the March HNB meeting, but asked if the service could ensure representation at future meetings, and wondered if there was a possibility of someone being available at the Schools Forum meeting on 24 March 2020 to respond to the queries raised.**

4. High Needs Block Provision Task and Finish Group Report

A brief verbal update was provided for the working group, which indicated that work on the Task and Finish Group work themes was continuing, with many tasks now embedded in ongoing county council processes.

The working group:

- a) Noted the information provided.**
- b) Welcomed the work that was continuing around the HNB T&F group themes as part of the ongoing work of the county council;**
- c) Asked if it were possible for the Schools Forum to receive a brief update on 24 March around the specific T&F group themes and the involvement of Forum members;**

5. Embedding System Leadership

This report provided information about 'Defining a new relationship with schools - Embedding System Leadership'.

Colleagues were aware that the county council has been reviewing its relationship with schools. As part of this process, the Director of Education and Skills and the Acting Head of Service (Education Improvement) had been presenting a number of events throughout the county over recent months about 'Defining a new relationship with schools - Embedding System Leadership'.

Appendices to the report provide a copy of the presentation used at these events and FAQ information that has subsequently been circulated via the portal.

Members discussed the information provided.

The working group:

- a) Noted the report;**
- b) Supported the educational vision behind the developments and the information provided at events throughout the county;**
- c) Commented that it may have been preferable to host combined Headteacher and CoG events to ensure representatives from a school received an identical message;**
- d) Acknowledged that there would always be uncertainties around any transition to a revised system/service offer;**
- e) Welcomed the involvement of cross sector school representatives on the Steering Group and the intention to introduce a newsletter and website to aid communication of key issues;**
- f) Requested that the names of the Steering Group representatives be published so that schools knew who to contact if they had queries or comments to feed into the process;**
- g) Commented that there was a perception that schools buying into the SSG would be subsidising the cost of the networks for schools that chose not to buy SSG from Lancashire;**
- h) Asked if information could be provided around the financial aspects of the new networks and the SSG offer;**
- i) Asked if someone would be available to attend the Schools Forum on 24 March to respond to the queries raised.**