

Item 9

Recommendations of the High Needs Block Working Group

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Brief Summary

On 30 November 2023, the High Needs Block Working Group considered several reports, including:

- **School Budget 2024/25**
- **Lancashire Schools Forum Operational Arrangements**
- **High Needs Block Commissioned Places 2024/25**
- **SEN Data**
- **High Needs Block Monitoring 2023/24**
- **Emotional Health and Wellbeing Commission Updates**

A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided in this report.

Recommendations

The Forum is asked to:

- a) Note the report from the High Needs Block Working Group held on 30 November 2023.
- b) Ratify the Working Group's recommendations.

Detail

On 30 November 2023, the High Block Working Group considered several reports. A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided below:

9.1 School Budget 2024/25

Following the Autumn statement on 22nd November 2023, no further funding was announced for the education sector. Therefore, the additional high needs funding allocated to support transitions and the creation of the IEST teams in 2023/24 will not be available for the 2024/25 financial year due to anticipated pressures within the funding blocks.



The Working Group.

- a) **Noted the information.**

9.2 Lancashire Schools Forum Operational Arrangements

The working group reviewed the proposed amendment in section 2.6 around conflicts of interest. The amendment requests members complete an annual form to declare any potential conflicts. In addition, if there is a possible conflict arising on an agenda, members will be required to inform the Schools Forum Clerk and the appropriate working group chair in advance.

If the proposed change is agreed by the three working groups, declaration forms will be sent to all members.

The Working Group.

- a) **Noted the amendment to the Operations Arrangement**
- b) **Supported the completion of annual declaration forms for forum members.**

9.3 High Needs Block Commissioned Places 2024/25

Each year the LA must submit a return to the DfE setting out the proposed changes to place numbers at certain types of institution, which are funded directly by the ESFA.

The 2024/25 High Needs Place Change Notification return for Lancashire was submitted by the deadline of 10 November 2023. The place change return included sections for:

- Special Academy Schools;
- FE Colleges;
- Mainstream Academy Schools - Post 16;
- Alternative Provision Academies
- Hospital Education Places
- Academy SEN Unit places.

The proposed 2024/25 commissioned places have been determined in consultation by authority services with the relevant providers.

Information about 2024/25 place proposals for institutions included on the return is provided in Appendix A.

Local Place Changes

In addition to those commissioned places that must be included on the DfE submission, the LA must commission other places locally.

Appendix A also includes 2024/25 commissioned place proposals for:

- Maintained Special Schools - Pre 16;
- Maintained Special Schools - Post 16;
- Alternative Provision;



- Maintained Mainstream Provision – SEN units and SERF Units;
- Special Post 16 Institutions.

Commissioned places for Special Schools, PRUs and units in mainstream schools for 2024/25 are included in Appendix A.

Independent and Non-maintained special schools

Separate arrangements exist for commissioning places at independent and non-maintained special schools.

Fortnightly panels meet to consider these placements and places are commissioned for those pupils where places at independent and non-maintained special schools are agreed.

The costs of these places will be dependent on the needs of the individual children. Members will be aware that there are significant pressures on the 'out-county' budget and that strategies are being implemented to ensure that more pupils are being supported in Lancashire schools going forward.

Arrangements for paying top-up funding to schools and other institutions.

Lancashire pupil related top up funding (pre and post 16) is currently calculated using Weighted Pupil Numbers (WPNs), which are used to fund the assessed need of each High Needs Pupil.

Top-up funding is re-determined up or down termly in line with the SEN counts in January, May and October.

School specific top-up funding will also be allocated to special schools for the total number of all pre and post 16 Lancashire pupils on the SEN count, to reflect different school related costs.

Similarly, the funding mechanism for AP provides a top-up based on the needs of individual pupils and also a Pupil Referral Unit Specific top-up.

Funded terms

April - August	September - December	January - March
5/12	4/12	3/12

A copy of the latest commissioned places for 2024/25 are attached at **Appendix A**.

Members raised some concerns around the calculation of intervention places. It was noted that it this can be reviewed for 2025/26.

The Working Group:

- Noted the report.**
- Supported the Commissioned Place numbers for 2024/25 but asked the LA to be mindful of the comments made.**
- Supported the review of intervention places in 2025/26**



9.4 SEN Data

During the recent LSSHTA meeting, members raised concerns around inaccuracies and the timing of the SEN data collection in October 2023. As a result, a letter was sent to the Schools Forum.

To summarise, 80% of special schools shared information to LSSHTA regarding the October 2023 delegation data collection. 100% of those schools had received delegation with inaccurate information. For example, pupils missing, pupils who were not on roll at the school and year 11 leavers on the data.

Sally Richardson, Head of Inclusion Service, attended the meeting and is looking at ways to improve the quality of the data going forward.

The Working Group:

- a) **Noted the information.**
- b) **Raised concerns around the validity of the SEN data and the impact this may have on funding.**
- c) **Encouraged the Inclusion Team to address these issues and members offered support.**

9.5 High Needs Block Monitoring 2023-2024

Due to the cost and demand led pressures on the High Needs Block budget, arrangements were introduced from 2018/19 to provide the Forum with termly budget HNB monitoring.

Period 1 to 7 2023/24 data is now available, and the monitoring and analysis was presented to the working group.

The High Needs Block budget is currently forecasting a circa £5m overspend at 31 March 2024.

The monitoring is an estimate of the full year forecast, based on expenditure that has occurred in the period between April – October 2023.

There remains significant ongoing financial pressure facing this block as the demand and costs continue to rise.

The Working Group:

- a) **Noted the report.**
- b) **Raised concerns around the forecasted balance at March 2024 and encouraged the Inclusion service to develop short and long term plans to reduce the strain on the block.**

9.6 Emotional Health and Wellbeing Commission Updates

Funding announcements for 2021/22 confirmed that the historic commitments element of the Central School Services Block (CSSB) will decrease from 2021 and reduce to zero.



Initial modelling of the impact of this reduction in Lancashire suggests that we may be able to protect the existing levels of DSG 'combined budget' contributions for 2024/25, as follows:

- Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service - £200k
- MASH - £150k

This will be subject to Schools Forum approval in January 2024, as part of the Schools Budget setting process.

To aid Forum consideration of these allocations, a report is provided from the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service providing a 2022-2023 update. This report is attached at Appendix B.

Members will recall that information about the use of DSG funding for Multi Agency Support Hub was presented at the High Needs Block 3rd October 2023 and funding was ratified by the Schools Forum in October 2023.

Due to the timing of the working group, this report was not available, therefore the Schools Forum is asked to;

- a) Note the report.**
- b) Express any views.**

