

Item 7

Recommendations of the High Needs Block Working Group

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Brief Summary

On 5 March 2024, the High Needs Block Working Group considered several reports, including:

- **School Forum membership**
- **High Needs Block Budget 2024/25**
- **SEN Data**
- **High Needs Block Monitoring 2023/24**

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 5 March 2024.
- b) Ratify the Working Group's recommendations.

Detail

On 5 March 2024, the High Block Working Group considered several reports. A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided below:

7.1 Matters Arising

Members raised the following items;

Post 16 Commissioned Places

It was raised that currently, Post 16 commissioned places are not redetermined annually, unlike the pre 16 places.

Officers agreed this would be reviewed for the 2025/26 budget setting process. Further update – Post 16 places are agreed in line with college places which are not



determined and set for the year. The LA has always aligned commissioned places in both Post 16 in special schools and colleges for consistency, so there is no additional place funding for post 16 special schools places.

Commissioned Place Process

Members shared feedback around the 2024/25 commissioned places process, in particular the Indicative Commissioned Place Numbers letter which was sent in October 2023.

Forum representatives will discuss with their sectors and report back to the Summer cycle of meeting where the process will be agreed for 2025/26.

Intervention Cap Places for PRU's

Members raised this item at the last meeting and requested an update. It was noted Officers are currently reviewing the process and that modelling for 2025/26 has begun. This will be presented to the working group in due course.

7.2 School Forum Membership

The High Needs Block considered the Schools Forum Membership outlined in Item 6.1.

The Working Group.

- a) Noted the information

7.3 High Needs Block Budget

At the Schools Forum on 11 January 2024, decisions, and recommendations about the 2024/25 Schools Budget were agreed.

In connection with the High Needs Block, the Forum unanimously supported the 2024/25 High Needs Block proposals, including:

- Agreeing on an increase in commissioned places.
- The historic commitments element transferred to the High Needs Block (from CSSB) to continue for;
 - 200K to Emotional Health and Wellbeing commissioned service
 - 150K to for the Multi-Agency safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- Increasing the Weighted Pupil Numbers (WPN) rate across all school and FE settings by 2% to £5,440;
 - For Specific Factors Special School and PRU School Specific factors uplifted by 2% as in 2023/24
- As the overall high needs funding increase is now included in the 2024 to 2025 high needs funding formula, the Dedicated Schools Grant



conditions of grant for 2024 to 2025 requires local authorities to pass on the same level of additional funding to these schools. The distribution of additional high needs funding at 3.4% to all Special Schools and PRUS.

On 18 January 2024, the County Council's Cabinet formally approved the Schools Budget for 2024/25.

Some elements of the Schools Budget required compliance checking by the ESFA and approval, this was received on 20th February 2024, and Schools Budgets were released on 28th February 2024.

Since 2022/23, the DfE now calculate the PPG allocations based on October school census data, rather than the January school census. This means that actual PPG information will be available much sooner, and the DfE have indicated that 2024/25 allocations should be notified to the LA in the summer term.

Once we receive the confirmed 2024/25 PPG allocations from DfE, we will inform schools of their actual PPG allocation for 2024/25 later in the financial year.

Academy schools will receive their PPG allocations directly from the ESFA.

The Working Group.

- a) Noted the information.

7.4 SEN Data

In February 2024, the School's Forum received a letter from the Lancashire Special School Business Manager network. The letter outlines the current issues schools are experiencing with termly redeterminations.

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.

As a group they are becoming increasingly frustrated with termly redeterminations and out of authority funding and the impact this has on school budgets and the provision for pupils.

The errors with the termly redeterminations were raised by the group 2019 which resulted in some improvement. However, this is not the current situation. A summary of the:

- WPN on the revised funding statement does not match the count submitted
- School specific numbers are incorrect on the funding statements
- New admissions are not included and leavers are not removed
- Bandings (agreed by SEND) are incorrect.
- Pupils disappear off the count for no reason or reappear having left years ago
- Where there are issues i.e. incorrect bandings or missing pupils – funding is not backdated
- Issues and errors flagged up are never acted upon



Schools Improvement and Inclusion officers were present at the meeting to respond to the letter received. A team of Business Support Officers have been assigned to cleanse the SEN data. This work is ongoing and may take a long time.

The LA are currently in the process of commissioning a company to create live attendance data for every child across the authority. This will be a new system and will contribute to improving the SEN data. It was noted at the working group that live attendance data is a statutory requirement from September 2024. Lancashire is currently looking to implement this system before September, updates and communication will be provided to schools at the earliest opportunity.

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) Welcomed the initiatives

7.5 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. A report detailing the available period 1 to 10 2023/24 data monitoring and analysis was presented to the working group.

It was noted that the High Needs Block budget is currently forecasting a circa £5.59 m 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 2023 – January 2024.

It was noted that 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 LA to develop short and long term plans to reduce the strain on the block.

