



Schools Forum Date: 17 March 2015 Time: 8.30 am Venue: Shrewsbury Training and Development Centre, Monkmoor, Shrewsbury	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u> C
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SCHOOLS FORUM TASK & FINISH GROUP

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Summary

At their meeting on 26 November 2015 Schools Forum agreed to the re-establishment of the Schools Forum Task & Finish Group, drawn from Schools Forum membership, to undertake the detailed work in relation to the consultation on, and subsequent implementation of, the proposed national fair funding formula. The Forum received a report earlier this term from the first meeting of the group on 21 January 2016.

This report provides the notes from a further meeting of the group held on 2 March 2016 and a number of key recommendations in relation to High Needs and Early Help funding.

Recommendation

To note the minutes from the meeting of the School Forum Task & Finish Group on 2 March 2016 and to endorse the following recommendations of the group:

- the re-establishment of the High Needs Task & Finish Group to review the current application of High Needs funding and the arrangements for reporting and monitoring spend
- the release of £600k in 2016-17 from the High Needs Block funding to support Early Help
- the establishment of an Early Help Task & Finish Group to undertake a review of the current application of resources to support Early Help and how the additional £600k DSG funding released in 2016-17 will be applied to existing contracts and services, to review how it will be used in 2017-18, and to look at improvements in provision going forward.

REPORT

1. On 26 November 2015 Schools Forum agreed to the re-establishment of a Task & Finish Group to carry out the detailed work required in the spring and summer of 2016 in relation to the proposed consultation and subsequent implementation of the Government's proposed move to a national fair funding formula from the financial year 2017-18.
2. At their meeting on 21 January 2016 Schools Forum considered a report from the group which had been called to meet to consider, in the absence of information on the national fair formula consultation, the projected underspend in 2015-16 on the centrally retained Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2015-16. It was clear from this meeting that more detailed work was required on this issue and so the group met again on 2 March 2016. The notes of the meeting are attached at Appendix 1.
3. The group considered a number of papers produced by officers. The first paper provided an analysis of the High Needs budget for 2016-17 (attached at Appendix 2). This paper illustrated that there are forecast demographic pressures in 2016-17 which will require additional resources to support top-up funding for independent providers and academies, non-schools post-16 provision and place funding. Further analysis was undertaken following the meeting and so the attached Appendix 2 is an update to that presented to the Task & Finish Group.
4. These pressures will be offset by savings emerging from a review of the High Needs Block base budget in 2015-16 and a realigning of resources from budget lines that have underspent in 2014-15 and 2015-16 eg the contingency budget line. The other factor to take into account is that Shropshire will be receiving a share of an additional £92.5m top-up funding made available nationally for High Needs, equating to £478k in 2016-17, which will be built into the base budget. The net effect of growth, reductions and additional funding, is a projected in-year saving in 2016-17 of £300k.
5. When taking into account the projected carried forward underspend from 2015-16, estimated at £700k (the paper to the Task & Finish Group indicated a £900k underspend), the analysis indicates that there is sufficient funding in play to support the proposal to release £600k towards the targeted work for schools through Early Help services. While half of this could be funded from base budget, half would have to be met in 2016-17 from the one off carry forward of the underspend from 2015-16. The updated carry forward figure of £700k does not fundamentally alter the scope for releasing funding in 2016-17.

6. The group received additional papers on the current provision of support to Early Help and details on the range of support to schools (attached at Appendix 3 and Appendix 4). These highlighted that in 2015-16 elements of targeted Early Help services are currently part funded from DSG, via the 'Contribution to Combined Budgets' line within the Central Provision within School Budget part of centrally retained DSG. The release of the £600k in 2016-17 would effectively double the funding of what was recognised by the group as important work in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.
7. The group acknowledged that the proposal to release the £600k from DSG in 2016-17 is a short term measure and that further work would be required to ensure that the funding available to support Shropshire's learners, through both High Needs and Early Help, needs to be fundamentally reviewed to ensure that it is being applied as effectively and efficiently as possible and is securing the highest possible outcomes.
8. It was therefore proposed that this urgent review work be undertaken through 2 separate Task & Finish Groups, one to look at High Needs funding, the other to look at targeted Early Help services. It was agreed that the groups need to be constituted and operational from early in the summer term.
9. The group concluded by recommending that Schools Forum endorse the proposals to:
 - re-establish the High Needs Task & Finish Group to undertake a review of the current application of High Needs funding and the arrangements for reporting and monitoring spend
 - the release of £600k in 2016-17 from the High Needs Block funding to support Early Help
 - establish an Early Help Task & Finish Group to undertake a review of the current application of resources to support Early Help and how the additional £600k DSG funding released in 2016-17 will be applied to existing contracts and services, to review how it will be used in 2017-18, and to look at improvements in provision going forward.