



## Schools Forum

Date: 14 September 2017

Time: 8:30 a.m.

Venue: Shrewsbury  
Training and Development  
Centre

Paper

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Public

## High Needs Funding Audit

**Responsible Officer** Phil Wilson

e-mail: phil.wilson@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743 254865

Fax: 01743 254538

### Summary

At the meeting on 8 June Schools Forum received a verbal report on the outcomes of a meeting of the High Needs Task & Finish Group in late May, which considered a consultant report on the review of high needs funding for the county's two special schools. The financial analysis and detail in the report fell short of the requirements and did not provide sufficient evidence to support 2 of the report's key recommendations, in particular that the funding for Severndale Specialist Academy remains the same.

The Principal of the academy and the Chair of Trustees, have written separately to the Chair of Schools Forum and the Director of Children's Services, expressing the significant concerns the trustees have with the current banding levels and the urgent need to conclude the banding review. After an exchange of correspondence and a meeting at the school with officers and the Portfolio holder for Children's Services in July, it was agreed that further detailed financial analysis is required to complete the work and present a decision-making report to Forum at their meeting on 7 December.

The Council is proposing to appoint an independent specialist, with a track record of similar work in other local authorities, to undertake this detailed financial analysis and benchmarking of banding levels, and is progressing this with some urgency. Severndale and Woodlands have indicated their willingness to co-operate with this work, which will require access their financial information.

A verbal update on progress with the appointment will be provided at the meeting.

### Recommendations

To note the appointment of an independent specialist to conclude the financial review of banding and top-up levels in the county's two special schools.

# REPORT

## Background

1. Schools Forum established a High Needs Task & Finish Group in March 2016 to undertake a review into high needs funding, including banding and top-up levels. This is set against the backdrop of the consultation on a national funding formula for high needs. An independent review of the banding system for Shropshire specialist schools was commissioned and a report considered by the group in May 2017 – a verbal report was provided for Forum members at their meeting on 8 June 2017.
2. The consensus of the group was that the report had not included sufficient analysis and assessment of the financial impact on the county's two specialist schools of the current banding and top-up levels to evidence 2 of the key recommendations, that the funding for Severndale Specialist Academy should remain unchanged and that the funding for Woodlands School should increase.
3. The Principal of the academy, together with the Chair of Trustees, have expressed their significant concerns, via correspondence with the Chair of Schools Forum and the Director of Children's Services, with the report's recommendations and the delay in concluding the banding review. The academy has undertaken their own review of needs and the costs of provision within the academy. Other concerns have been raised by the academy which are outside of the remit of Schools Forum and are being followed up on separately to the funding issues.
4. Following a meeting at the academy on 14 July, attended by the Portfolio holder for Children's Services and senior officers from Learning & Skills, it was agreed that further detailed financial impact analysis of the academy's finances was required to better understand the specific aspects of the banding arrangements that are reported to require realigning to better meet the reasonable costs of delivering the provision. This will include the academy sharing their financial information and internal review of the costs of provision. For Woodlands School, as a maintained school, access to the detailed finances of the school is more straightforward.
5. Following discussions with a number of contacts in local authorities facing similar challenges regarding the setting of banding and top-up levels, details have been sourced on a number of independent specialists who have undertaken financial reviews of high needs funding in other authorities, including benchmarking, and would be available to carry out the work in the given timescale. Officers are following up on these leads to secure an appointment to undertake this urgent work, with a view to the work being carried out in the early autumn and providing recommendations for a decision-making report to be considered by Schools Forum at their meeting on 7 December.
6. Schools Forum are asked to note this report and the actions being undertaken to address this outstanding issue.