



Schools Forum Date: 24 November 2016 Time: 8.30 am Venue: Shrewsbury Training and Development Centre, Monkmoor, Shrewsbury	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u> D
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HIGH NEEDS AND EARLY HELP TASK & FINISH GROUPS

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Summary

At their meeting on 17 March 2016 Schools Forum agreed to the re-establishment of the High Needs Task & Finish Group and the establishment of a separate Early Help Task & Finish Group. The Forum considered a further report on 9 June 2016 and approved the Terms of Reference for each of the groups, including the suggested membership and project timetables.

Forum received an interim report on the work of the two groups at their meeting on 15 September 2016. The groups have had further meetings on 6 October 2016, which this paper is reporting back on.

The project timetables for each of the Task & Finish Groups proposed that this meeting would receive the final reports on the work of the separate Task & Finish Groups. However, given a number of outstanding issues, there is a need for at least one further meeting of each of the groups in order for them to consider their draft reports, to be produced by officers, on the outcomes and conclusions of the respective group's work. It is therefore proposed that the final reports to Forum be pushed back to the meeting on 19 January 2017.

At their meetings on 6 October, both of the groups considered and discussed the issue of extending the release of £600k from the High Needs Block of funding beyond 2016-17, for a further year, into the financial year 2017-18. Schools Forum are asked to consider and endorse the recommendation to extend this funding to support Early Help for a further year.

Recommendations

- To note the minutes from the meetings of the High Needs Task & Finish Group and Early Help Task & Finish Group on 6 October 2016.
- To endorse the earmarking £600k from the High Needs Block of funding into 2017-18 to continue supporting Early Help work of behalf of children and families, as recommended by the Task & Finish Groups.

REPORT

1. On 17 March 2016 Schools Forum agreed to the establishment of two separate Task & Finish Groups to undertake reviews in relation to high needs funding and the use of resources to support Early Help. On 9 June 2016 Forum approved the draft Terms of Reference for the two groups, which included suggested membership of the groups and outline project timetables, allowing for regular progress reports to Schools Forum.
2. Schools Forum received an interim progress report, on 15 September 2016, on the work of the two groups, who had held separate meetings on the same day (14 June and 15 July 2016). The third meetings of the separate groups took place on 6 October 2016 - the minutes of the meetings are attached for Forum member attention and noting (Appendices 1 and 2).
3. The original project plan, approved by Forum on 9 June, proposed that a final report from the two Task & Finish Groups would be produced for the 24 November Schools Forum meeting. While each of the groups have met on three occasions, there are a number of outstanding issues that will require each of the groups to meet at least once more to consider and address. There is also a need for each of the groups to consider and approve a draft report on the outcomes of their work, for reporting back to Forum. This hasn't been possible ahead of the 24 November meeting.
4. It is therefore proposed that the groups are each called together for at least one further meeting to conclude their work as per their original Terms of Reference - before the end of term if diaries permit – with a view to producing a final report for Forum to consider at their meeting on 19 January 2017.

High Needs Task & Finish Group

5. The key outstanding piece of work commissioned via the High Needs Task & Finish Group relates to an independent review of the banding system for the Shropshire specialist schools and securing improvements to the way in which top-up funding is allocated. Following an Invitation to Quote exercise the contract has now been awarded. The work will be completed in the early spring term, with a view to the new banding arrangements being introduced from April 2017. The Task & Finish Group will be asked to consider and comment on the independent review and report back to Forum.

6. The other area of work for the group relates to the Government proposals for the reform of the High Needs funding. The outcomes from the first stage of the national consultation on the funding reforms, together with the launch of the second stage of consultation, are widely reported as being released before the end of the autumn term. The membership of the High Needs Task & Finish Group has the range of skills, experience and specialist knowledge to undertake the work required in assessing the impact of the reforms on High Needs provision in Shropshire and to respond most effectively to the consultation.

Early Help Task & Finish Group

7. This Task & Finish Group has essentially fulfilled their brief in having reviewed the use of resources from DSG to support Early Help. They have helped inform the recommendation to Schools Forum that the level of funding released from the High Needs Block to support Early Help should continue. A further meeting of the Early Help Task & Finish Group to consider and approve a final report to Forum on 19 January 2017 is proposed.
8. The group has acknowledged however, that there is more work to do in relation to Early Help. The challenges facing all partners and stakeholders working to support some of the most vulnerable young people and families in Shropshire remain. There is a key requirement to continue to develop a coherent Early Help offer, to engage stakeholders in developing strategies to meet the needs of children and families, and to maximise the outcomes from the wide range of funding sources through joint commissioning, co-commissioning and pooling resources. The imminent Shropshire Council appointment of a Head of Service for Early Help, Partnerships and Commissioning demonstrates the strategic importance and priority for this work.
9. While the work of the Early Help Task & Finish Group is - subject to one final meeting - largely completed, there will be a requirement for further and increased engagement around Early Help among all of the partners and stakeholders, key amongst whom are schools. Other working groups will be constituted in the New Year, onto which representation from the school's sector will be sought. The reporting lines won't be directly to Schools Forum, however they will be kept informed via the DSG and High Needs Block monitoring reports in particular, on the impact and outcomes of the schools funding being applied to this area of support to children and families.

Funding for Early Help in 2017-18

10. In 2016-17 there are two strands of funding from centrally retained DSG that are underwriting Early Help contracts and support:
 - £593k from the Contribution to Combined Budgets, that has supported specific Early Help contracts for a number of years
 - £600k released from the High Needs Block in 2016-17 (approved by Schools Forum in March 2016).

11. Both of the Task & Finish Groups have considered the details of the Early Help provision for schools this funding supports. There has been little challenge to the importance, need for and use of this support for children and families, as well as an acceptance that removal of any individual element of the provision could have a far-reaching and negative impact. There is, however, an acknowledged need for an increased sector-wide understanding and awareness raising on how this schools funding is targeted and used to deliver the best outcomes for children and families.
12. While there remain some reservations, the Task & Finish Groups have agreed that the £600k released from the High Needs Block in 2016-17, should also be earmarked for Early Help in 2017-18 to continue to support this important work. They are, therefore, ahead of producing their final reports for the January 2017 meeting, requesting that Schools Forum endorse their recommendation to earmark £600k from the High Needs Block to support Early Help.
13. The monitoring and reporting on the outcomes from the application of this funding will form part of the future DSG monitoring reports Forum receive and consider at each of their meetings.