



Schools Forum

Date: 17 January 2019

Time: 8.30 am

Venue: Shrewsbury
Training and Development
Centre, Monkmoor,
Shrewsbury

Item

Paper

D

HIGH NEEDS FUNDING TASK & FINISH GROUP

Responsible Officer Phil Wilson

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

Tel: (01743) 254344 Fax (01743) 254538

Summary

Schools Forum is presented with a Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring report at each of their meetings. The most recent report on 22 November 2018 highlighted a forecast overspend on the High Needs Block at the end of the 2018-19 financial year of £1.569m. This was set in the context of recognised pressure on High Needs Block funding across a large majority of local authorities.

It has become evident that there is a need to develop a financial plan for the High Needs Block for 2019-20 onwards given the current overspend, and the anticipated growth in demand and costs for SEND support that will continue to place significant pressure on the resources available through the High Needs Block. Following discussion with the Chair of Schools Forum it has been agreed to re-establish the High Needs Funding Task & Finish Group, specifically to work with officers in developing the financial plan.

A draft Terms of Reference has been drawn up for Forum's consideration, including suggested membership and a project timetable. Given the need to review the current SEND policy that frames spending, it is proposed that Forum representation on the group will be supplemented by representation from the Central Policy Group and newly established Headteacher Forum – LA Schools.

Recommendation

To approve the Terms of Reference, membership and project timetable for the High Needs Funding Task & Finish Group.

REPORT

1. Through the recent Dedicated Schools Grant monitoring reports considered by Schools Forum at each of their meetings, it is evident that the High Needs Block is under significant financial pressure. The monitoring report presented at the 22 November 2018 Forum meeting highlighted a forecast overspend in 2018-19 of £1.569m.
2. This financial pressure is not unique to Shropshire and there is evidence from an increasing range of sources that there is a national issue in respect of high needs funding. The f40 lobby group has been calling for an immediate injection of new funding nationally, estimated on increased costs and demand since 2015, of at least £1.5bn. New research from the Local Government Association estimates there will be a potential funding gap of £1.6bn for SEND children by 2020-21.
3. In response to the growing chorus of concerns being raised by schools, colleges and local authorities about the pressure on high needs budgets, Secretary of State for Education Damian Hinds MP, in a written statement on 17 December 2018, confirmed additional high needs funding allocations totalling £125m to local authorities in each of the years 2018-19 and 2019-20. Shropshire Council will be receiving an additional £627,055 in 2018-19 and a further £627,055 in 2019-20. The written statement is available at <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-12-17/HCWS1185/>
4. While the new cash injection is welcomed, it does not fully address the funding pressures in Shropshire, falling significantly short of what is required to underwrite rising costs resulting from increased demand. The Chair of Schools Forum, in discussion with Council officers, agreed to the re-establishment of the High Needs Funding Task & Finish Group to review high needs funding in line with SEND policy and to develop a medium term financial plan that seeks to sustain quality provision for the children and young people of Shropshire.
5. A draft Terms of Reference for the group is appended to this report. The draft includes the suggested membership of the group and an outline project timetable, allowing for regular progress reports to Schools Forum. It is intended that membership is drawn from beyond Schools Forum, in particular from the Central Policy Group and newly established Headteacher Forum – LA Schools. It is proposed that the group will begin their work this half-term and look to report back to School Forum with a final report at the 6 June 2019 meeting.