

TO: SCHOOLS FORUM
DATE: 12 JANUARY 2017

HIGH NEEDS BLOCK REVIEW
Director Children, Young People & Learning

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek endorsement from the Executive to implement the recommendations within the attached High Needs Block funding (HNBF) review report

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **For the Executive to NOTE the recommendations and rationale on which they are based.**
- 2.2 **For the Executive to APPROVE the implementation of the recommendations given, subject to sufficient resources.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The recommendations contained in the report have implications for the nature of Bracknell Forest's provision for Special Educational Needs and Alternative Education.
- 3.2 This will affect all schools in the Local Authority and require negotiation with current specialist provision at Kennel Lane School, College Hall, out of area providers and additional resource centres regarding funding levels and provision.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Continue with the present arrangements. This is not acceptable because:
- a. The changing educational policy landscape and the need for a higher degree of school sector driven change
 - b. Proposed revisions to the way LAs are funded for High Needs pupils will reduce the flexibility the LA currently has to manage this budget alongside the schools budget
 - c. Overspending within the HNBF cannot be sustained.
 - d. Inefficient use of public money must be addressed.
- 4.2 Disregard findings from the review and seek other recommendations. This is not appropriate because:
- a. The basis for the review, procurement procedure and subsequent engagement with the consultants has been robust.

- b. The consultants have consulted with all schools and had a high level of engagement with school leadership teams fostering confidence in the validity of the process.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The attached independent review of the current High Needs Block spending was commissioned by Children, Young People & Learning (CYPL) following consultation with the Schools Forum which endorsed the terms of reference and agreed the cost should be financed from the Dedicated Schools Grant.
- 5.2 CYPL Departmental Management Team has considered this report and accepts the report and the recommendations within it.
- 5.3 The purpose of the review was to produce a report including recommendations for the future and a first draft of a new Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy for Bracknell Forest. The outcomes/ recommendations will form a work plan and be consulted on to inform future spending decisions.
- 5.4 Areas considered by the review team:
 - 1. To assess if the current SEND funding system in the range of maintained education provision meets needs, delivers effective outcomes and value for money
 - 2. Identify existing good practice and make recommendations on improvements in SEND processes and funding allocation specifically the SEN panel process which considers whether or not pupils should be given a Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and the current base funding and bandings used to agree top up funding
 - 3. Analyse the use of High Needs Block funding in
 - a 20% sample of mainstream schools,
 - the local special school and one other comparable special school where Bracknell Forest places pupils
 - two post-18 providers
 - the secondary Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)
 - and benchmark against schools and providers that the review team consider have good practice; collect and analyse the views of a focus group of key stakeholders including parents/carers about the provision
 - 4. Analyse the evidence base for the model used in some LAs of devolving a higher level of funding to schools (sometimes to geographic school clusters) to meet SEND needs prior to the formal EHCP processes and comment on the desirability of this approach in Bracknell Forest.
 - 5. Analyse the existing LA wide provision against current and projected needs and make recommendations on
 - how mainstream provision could be developed to better meet needs
 - the best use of existing specialist provision
 - the scope for re-directing resources into additional specialist provision locally in the medium and long term.

5.5 The recommendations contained in the report are:

- I. **Increasing strategic leadership by the school sector across the SEND system in Bracknell Forest**
 - Establishing a Bracknell Forest SEND strategic group that is a partnership between nominated Headteachers and the Council's Department for Children, Young People and Learning.
- II. **Strong co-ordinated local authority leadership for planning of places and funding and commissioning**
 - The review has identified a mismatch between some commissioned specialist places and likely demand, whilst at the moment there is no clear mechanism to formally amend specialist place numbers
 - Current provision at Kennel Lane School, College Hall, Additional Resource Centres and within Non Maintained Special School (NMSS) should be reviewed to focus on outcomes, pathways of support and maximise value for money/ efficient use of the HNBF. Any changes to this provision will require consultation.
- III. **Greater coherence to the SEND system designed with the child's need at the centre**
 - Support pathways for each major SEND category should be mapped to support the LA in commissioning provision to meet needs identified in schools
- IV. **A data-rich SEND system that understands the differences it is making through planning and commissioning.**
 - Good quality, reliable data is necessary to underpin developments across the renewed SEND system. This is not currently in place.

Full details are on pages 61 – 70 in the attached High Needs Block Funding review report.

- 5.6 It is anticipated that in implementing these recommendations and emerging DfE guidance will result in a series of proposed actions for the consideration of the Executive in shaping the way the High Needs Block is spent going forward. The recommendations for change will also need to take account of the national funding reforms, where the current DfE consultation document indicates the potential for a £2.327m (15%) reduction in the high needs funding grant to £12.858m over the medium to long term.

6 **ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS**

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The report sets out a legal review and consultation of the high needs budget. The review should be careful that whilst it looks at how the high needs funding block is used more efficiently, the review should not stray into adjusting the threshold for the gateway to a plan which is set out in the report namely that a child requires a plan where they have a special educational need for provision which is in excess of that which a school alone should be expected to provide.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The Borough Treasurer is satisfied that no significant financial implications arise from this interim report. Any final recommendations for change will need to be fully costed, evaluated and deliverable within the overall funding available to support high needs pupils.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Not applicable at this point, but may be appropriate alongside the consultation process to address certain recommendations particularly where that results in changes to provision.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 Potential financial risks are being mitigated through conducting this review. There is a risk of reputational damage by making changes to the way SEN funding is being used and this is being mitigated through extensive stakeholder involvement and a communication strategy which will highlight improvements in value for money and services better matched to local needs.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 All schools/ academies, parents forum, officer meetings

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Online, face to face (individual interviews and group)

Representations Received

- 7.3 None

Supporting Papers

High Needs Block review report

Contact for further information

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