

TO: SCHOOLS FORUM
DATE: 13 JULY 2017

**COUNCIL RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RAISED BY
THE SCHOOLS FORUM REGARDING HIGH NEEDS BLOCK FUNDING
Director, Children Young People and Learning**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Proposals for the 2017 – 2018 High Needs Block were presented at Schools Forum on 9th March 2017. Whilst questions were largely addressed at the time, it was agreed that a more detailed response would be provided together with an update on the High Needs Block review

2 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 The following section sets out the questions as listed in the printed draft minutes of the last meeting, together with the response from the council.
- 2.2 **What percentage of children fell into the HNB and what percentage of the schools budget was spent on them?**
- This was addressed in the minutes of the last meeting with a table distributed.
 - 17.5% of Dedicated Schools Grant is allocated to the High Needs Block and there is 3.8% of the school population being supported through this funding.
- 2.3 **Concern was raised that funding was being proposed for an unknown number of pupils at Rise@GHC when funding for expected number of pupils in other budgets was being cut.**
- There is a clear forecast for pupil numbers contained within the budget plan.
 - The budget plan for Rise@GHC has been presented to the Forum each year to approve at which point actual pupil numbers are included.
 - The provision is being monitored to ensure that it is providing a service for the nature of pupils anticipated and that projected HNB savings are on track.
 - The Head of SEN and Head of Department Finance are members of the RISE Management Board
 - 2017-18 HNB budget proposals from the council included reductions to 2 budgets; Kennel Lane Special School and non-LA special schools. Both reductions were based on costed estimates of a realistic assessment of the number and needs of children and young people expected to be placed in these institutions. All budgets have been set with sufficient funds to meet forecast costs.
- 2.4 **Was there scope for income to be produced from utilising unused rooms/resources at Rise@GHC?**
- This resource forms part of Garth Hill College and any additional use of the building/ rooms could potentially form an income for the school not the LA.
 - The resources at the Rise@GHC could potentially be traded by incorporating Autism outreach support into the offer and this is being reviewed as part of the HNB/ SEN action plan together with transformation planning.

- 2.5 **Was a strategy document available detailing the decision made for the development of SEN places at BLV?**
- BLV has been a planned development for a number of years with schools forum involved in the decision making throughout.
 - The number of SEN places within the development were identified through percentage modelling based on a school of this size and using Priority School Building Programme calculators.
 - The design team were briefed to ensure that the school provides an integrated SEN facility to enable mainstream education and learning for pupils with a range of Special Education Needs and Disabilities:
- 2.6 **The current budgets for education out of school, including Home Tuition and Outreach was being maintained but concern was raised that a shortfall already existed with regard to access to Home Tuition.**
- There was an underspend of £22k within the home tuition budget for 2016 – 17.
 - This is a very volatile budget and arrangements for accessing home tuition are closely monitored to ensure that we meet our statutory duties with regard to pupils who cannot attend school for 15 days or more due to medical needs, it is supported by a medical professional and that the provision is in the best interest of the pupil accessing it.
- 2.7 **The projected number of learners at Rise@GHC had reduced from 56 to 47 and concern was raised that research and planning had not been rigorous enough prior to the development of this unit with a large budget for a relatively small number of pupils.**
- There was a significant amount of research and planning undertaken.
 - Schools forum were part of the decision making process throughout, commencing in June 2013 and subsequently including approving the initial budget plan in January 2015 and annually thereafter.
 - This included forecasting pupil numbers by SEN category based on historic trend values completed by Atkins incorporating predicted population growth and known housing growth data.
 - The aim is still for all 56 places to be filled by 2020-21 but the unit is still financially viable at the lower level of occupancy as it is unrealistic to expect the unit to be permanently filled to capacity. All specialist providers will operate with a vacancy factor.
 - All provisions are currently funded in this way. Numbers for 2016-17 were confirmed and communicated to forum in March 2017.
- 2.8 **Whilst the budget for mainstream schools – Element 3 short term interventions is proposed to be increased from £5k to £25k, there continued to be concern that for some children at primary level their mental and emotional needs were not being met. A lack of resource could lead to an increase in temporary exclusions which could not be managed even with the increased budget.**
- Alternative Provision for primary aged pupils without a statement had a proposed budget of £50k so together with the £20k increase mentioned above; there is a total additional budget of £70k which can now be utilised.
 - Bracknell Forest schools rates of exclusion at primary phase are one of the lowest in the country and well below the national average.

Any decisions regarding new resource must be considered within the direction of travel outlined by Government in future funding proposals and asserted in ***Creating a Culture: How school leaders can optimise behaviour, DfE, 2017.***

Recommendation 1

Fund schools to create internal inclusion units to offer targeted early specialist intervention with the primary aim of reintegrating students back into the mainstream school community. This funding should be focused on schools with higher than average levels of challenging behaviour, and should also be focused on schools that have already demonstrated reasonable efforts to create this provision using their existing budgets and resources.

Government Response

*The Government's planned changes to alternative provision (AP) support the spirit of this recommendation. Under these measures, **it is our ambition to give schools control of budgets for AP, alongside introducing stronger lines of accountability for schools when placing pupils in AP.** Schools would be responsible for commissioning AP for pupils who need it and for the pupil's educational outcomes. This will incentivise schools to take earlier action, which can include through supporting pupils in internal inclusion units where pupils are at risk of exclusion, and ensure that where AP is required it is in the best interests of the child.*

- 2.9 **CAMHS and Emotional Wellbeing - concern was raised about the long wait for tier 3 access.**
- This was addressed at the meeting on the 9th March.
 - Work is being undertaken by the Health and Wellbeing Board to address this and Members were invited to view the documentation relating to this which was available online.
 - Additionally, work is underway in collaboration with the Clinical Commissioning Group as part of the SEND strategy development to review and enhance lower level support.
- 2.10 The High Needs Block review has been completed with four key recommendations made. This review and respective recommendations has been through the Council decision making process, a headline plan developed (attached) and the implementation of the actions is underway.
- Increasing strategic leadership by the school sector across the SEND system in Bracknell Forest
 - Strong co-ordinated local authority leadership for planning of places and funding and commissioning
 - Greater coherence to the SEND system designed with the child's need at the centre.
 - A data-rich SEND system that understands the differences it is making through planning and commissioning.
- 2.11 Key actions to date are: SEN strategy group established and meeting regularly, Rainbow resource relocation underway, agreement with Ranelagh reached regarding the resource unit, review of the quality of provision completed at College Hall, secondary schools reviewing their role and needs for Alternative Provision, SEND strategy initial draft completed and ready for consultation then co-production, re- invigoration of the parent/ carer forum including involvement in the SEN improvement partnership and engagement with the youth council to shape the SEN strategy.
- 2.12 Local authorities should use their high needs budget to provide the most appropriate support package for an individual with SEND in a range of settings, taking account of parental and student choice, whilst avoiding perverse incentives to over-identify high

Unrestricted

needs pupils and students. High needs funding is also intended to support good quality alternative provision for pupils who cannot receive their education in schools.

- 2.13 Therefore, the implementation of the HNB recommendations cannot be taken in isolation. The SEND strategy, Government reforms to funding and accountability together with the transformation of CYPL will all need to be considered alongside these developments to ensure synergy

A position statement on the Headline High Needs Block Plan is set out in Annex 1.

3 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 3.1 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.

4 STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 4.1 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.

Background Papers

High Needs Block review report

DfE High Needs Block funding consultation

Creating a Culture: How school leaders can optimise behaviour, DfE, 2017.

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