

TO: SCHOOLS FORUM
DATE: 10 DECEMBER 2020

**IMPROVING LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE OVER HIGH NEEDS FUNDING BLOCK:
TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SCHOOLS FORUM SUB-GROUP**
Executive Director: People

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out an update on the Terms of Reference for the Schools Forum Sub-Group. This group works with the LA to quantify the current pressures on the high needs budget and identify solutions.
- 1.2 The Group is tasked with supporting LA officers to:
- Review the financial impact of existing national SEND policy locally.
 - Identify any areas where immediate savings can be made
 - Identify any changes in the way that SEND services and provision is currently delivered that will secure future savings whilst maintaining positive impact for children and young people with SEND.
 - Maintain oversight of the delivery of the priorities set out within the Bracknell Forest SEND Commissioning Plan (2020 – 2022).

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **To APPROVE the terms of reference set out in Appendix 1.**
- 2.2 **To APPROVE the appointment of Jenny Baker, Head Teacher of Kennel Lane School as the Chair of the Sub-Group from 1 January 2021 to 31 August 2022.**

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 In Bracknell Forest, the High Needs Block is now overspending. If current demand for SEND provision continues to increase and resources remain in line with predictions, this overspend is forecast to amount to around £4.5m per annum. The role of the Schools Forum Sub-Group is to work in partnership with the local authority to ensure appropriate steps were being taken to address the financial position in this respect.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 None.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION.

- 5.1 Nationally, it has been reported that the gap between high needs funding and high needs expenditure has created a collective deficit of over £500m and this despite increases in funding from the DfE is forecast to continue to increase. Government is concerned by the financial difficulties arising and as previously reported, has increased monitoring and intervention activities of LA's High Needs Block spend most specifically through the introduction of the DSG Deficit Management Tool.

- 5.2 The Education and Skills Funding Agency permits the setting up of local working groups that focuses on specific priorities (as set out in Section 1 of Schools Forum: Operational and good practice guide May 2020).
- 5.3 The core purpose of the Schools Forum Sub-Group is to use a collaborative approach to quantify the current pressure on the high needs budget and identify solutions. The Group will review Bracknell Forest Council's application of the High Needs Block and develop a clearer understanding of the current and future forecast pressures on the authority's funding allocation.
- 5.4 Tasked with ensuring appropriate level of resources are available and that the various developments needed to address mounting pressures on the High Needs Block, Bracknell Forest Council has agreed to:
- Appoint a lead commissioning officer (vacant position to be advertised following HR approval).
 - making available commissioning support and consistency in procuring and maintaining SEND provision through appropriate resources and additional capacity.
 - Increased resource available to produce accurate and timely data for relevant partners to access as an evidence base for performance and impact.
 - Increase capacity available to the SEN management Team in the absence of a Service Lead for SEN.
 - Commitment to a cross-service governance panel of the delivery of the SEN commissioning plan that also includes partners from Health. To achieve this and to coordinate a robust and coherent approach, a project manager has been appointed from the Council's Transformation Team who is now finalising details for the scope of the project.
- 5.5 The Sub-Group were formally invited to express an interest to chair the meetings from January 2021. Jenny Baker, Head Teacher at Kennel Lane School responded to put herself forward which the Sub-Group have noted. No further nominations were received.

ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

6 Director of Resources

- 6.1 The Director of Resources is satisfied that no significant financial implications arise from agreeing this paper and that the work of Sub-group is an essential and key element of working towards a balanced budget over the medium term.

Borough Solicitor

- 6.2 The relevant legal issues are addressed within the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

[Contacts for further information](#)

Kashif Nawaz
Head of Children's Support Service, 01344 35 3318
Kashif.nawaz@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Rachel Morgan
Assistant Director, Education and Learning,
Rachel.morgan@bracknell-forest.gov.uk