

To: **SCHOOLS FORUM**  
**18 NOVEMBER 2021**

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**High Needs Block Briefing Update**  
**Assistant Director – Education and Learning**

**1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Schools Forum has requested a detailed briefing regarding actions being taken to address the High Needs Block deficit budget and the strategies being implemented to secure financial probity of this funding in the future.
- 1.2 There are a number of projects that have been developed around different aspects of SEND provision which have been monitored and scrutinised by a number of boards; High Needs Project Board, People Change Board, SEND Improvement Partnership Group, Children and Young Peoples Performance Board and Members School Improvement Accountability Board.

**2 Supporting Information**

- 2.1 The HNB grant provided by the DfE to LA's is intended to fund support for SEND children in the borough. The grant, even after the latest increase, is insufficient to meet demands despite an ambitious cost saving and improvement programme. The HNB budget over spent by £4.8m in 2020-21 and the current forecasted deficit at 31 March 2023 has increased to £20.9m. The DfE has strengthened their financial monitoring arrangements and interventions with those LAs experiencing the most significant difficulties which may include BFC.
- 2.2 A set of slides have been provided which contain details of the areas of work which are focused on the High Needs Block. The aim of these projects is to reduce the deficit of the High Needs Block (HNB) element of the schools' budget by implementing and monitoring key elements of the SEND commissioning plan and developing a robust strategy and delivery model.

The timescale for the projects is 3-5 years with the aim of making a significant savings impact; amount to be determined.

- 2.3 The areas of focus are as follows:

1. **Governance Framework & processes**
2. **Building relationships**
3. **Service & Process Review**

- a. Service Review
- b. Process Review: assessments

#### 4. **Data**

- a. Update sufficiency analysis & align data to service needs

#### 5. **Developing the market for SEND / AP & Support**

- a. Specially Resourced Provisions (SRP)
- b. Banding Matrix
- c. Update against priorities and deliverables

#### 6. **Commissioning**

- a. East Berkshire Integrated Therapies (detailed update to follow)
- b. Short Breaks and future commissioning approach (detailed update to follow)
- c. Alternative Provision (AP) - Review Quality Assurance & Due Diligence processes and Commissioning approach
- d. Explore effective routes to market for complex placements

2.4 The Department of Education published recommendations for a SEND delivery model in 2021. We have considered this model and are developing a 'locality' delivery model that closely aligns with these recommendations.

In response to recommendations we have three key priorities:

1. Transformation of the SEND Support Services
2. Developing responsive, flexible and effective local specialist provision
3. Building the SEND early help local team and offer around mainstream settings

2.5 The aim of the priorities is to ensure:

- a) Greater inclusion of children educated in their local community school
- b) Fewer pupils in segregated independent provision
- c) Reduction in complaints, mediations, appeals and tribunals
- d) Reduction in exclusions
- e) Less demand and pressure on high-cost provision
- f) Improving outcomes for children and young people

#### 4 **Risk Management Issues**

4.1 There are potential challenges to this model, however it has been identified that this model has been successful in other authorities and has resulted in savings to the High Needs Budget. The key challenges will be:

- a) The disruption caused by the re-design of the SEN support service and the changeover of staff to implement the interim structure
- b) The longstanding systemic issues around governance and allocation of resources means the changes in culture and systems will take time to embed the new processes needed
- c) The change in culture and ways of working to ensure co-production of services with families and schools and capturing and acting on improvements needed
- d) Prioritising really robust and regular communication with all our stakeholders
- e) Although savings will be identified quickly, through improved efficiency, larger savings will not be achieved in a short time frame.

#### Background Papers

School Forum High Needs Block – SEND Initiatives (PPT pack)

#### Contact for further information

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