

## **Schools Forum**

**October 11<sup>th</sup> 2013**

### **Update on the Review of the High Needs Block**

This report relates to both maintained and academy schools

For information only

#### **Recommendation**

The Schools Forum is recommended to:

- 1.0 Note the progress being made to review the spending areas within the High Needs Block element of the Dedicated Schools Grant
- 2.0 Identify volunteers to be part of a Schools Forum High Needs Block Working Party

#### **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 At the Schools Forum in May, a report was presented regarding the forecast over spend against the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). It was noted that at that stage, it was forecast to be £3.876m and that a report would be brought to this meeting to update the Forum regarding progress on reducing that overspend, the potential savings identified and detailing the impact of any reduction.

#### **2.0 Prioritisation of Spend**

2.1 It is clear that where financial resources are scarce, all funding decisions should be focused on achieving the priorities of an organisation. In terms of the High Needs Block funding, there needs to be a link to a strategy for these vulnerable pupils. Since May, the Local Authority has carried out work to develop a Vulnerable Children's Strategy. Whilst this strategy is still to be endorsed by the Peoples Group Leadership Team, it includes 13 priorities that the Local Authority should be working towards and these have been used as way of prioritising the High Needs Block budgets.

2.2 The High Needs Block Task and Finish Group (HNBT&FG), made up of a wide range of Local Authority Officers, has met several times over the last few months to identify areas of efficiency, taking into account the priorities detailed within the strategy.

2.3 As a result of those meetings, an assessment has been made of each of the budget headings within the High Needs Block to detail the following:

- What services the funding provides
- The number of pupils affected by the funding
- The most recent outcomes of the funding
- How the funding meets the priorities identified within the Vulnerable Children Strategy
- An impact assessment on the reduction or deletion of the funding

2.4 The priorities detailed within the Vulnerable Children's Strategy are:

1	To reduce the achievement gap between Looked After Children and their peers
2	To reduce the achievement gap between those pupils with SEND and their peers
3	To reduce the achievement gap between pupils on FSM and their peers
4	To monitor and challenge the effectiveness of education providers: hold them to account for improving level of attainment and progress for all pupils: and for narrowing the gap between all pupils and any underperforming group
5	To reduce the % of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET)
6	To reduce the number of pupils who are permanently excluded from school
7	To work in partnership with specialist providers to ensure that learners with the most complex needs can access appropriate local provision
8	To develop a more diverse provider market which is better able to respond to and meet a range of individual learner need
9	To enable young people and their families to access personal budgets
10	To identify a school place for all children who are hard to place
11	To promote good attendance
12	To ensure that periods of unauthorised absence for pupils who are too ill to attend school impact as little as possible on the pupils education
13	To monitor arrangements for pupils educated other than at school

2.5 Appendix A shows the details of each of the budget headings and is sorted in order of score. At this stage, this document still requires further work and moderation but the intention for its inclusion is to demonstrate to Forum members the approach that is being taken.

2.6 All of the priorities currently have equal weighting and where a priority is met, the scheme scores 1 point. It is recognised that weightings of these priorities may be required to reflect their impact. A risk assessment was also carried out to understand the likelihood of there being a risk to either the Local Authority or pupils and their families and the impact that this would have. The framework used to carry out the assessment was that used corporately within the Local Authority; both the likelihood and impact were scored from a range of 1 to 4 with a score of 16 being the most severe.

2.7 Appendix A shows the start of the prioritisation process by scoring the schemes taking into account the contribution towards priorities and a risk assessment score. The HNBT&FG collectively scored the schemes to encourage equity in the approach. It is intended that the end result should be to suggest one of three options; no change, reduced or deleted service or improved service delivery.

2.8 Other reports on the agenda relating to strategies to reduce the reliance on out of Local Authority places and changes to primary inclusion support are indicative of the approaches being taken to change the way that key services are delivered as a way of reducing costs in the future.

### 3.0 Further works

3.1 The HNBT&FG will continue to meet and refine the detail within Appendix A. Once it is felt that the data is robust, recommendations for change will need to be put forward.

3.2 However, members of the Schools Forum could play a key role in this assessment process. Officers suggest that a Schools Forum High Needs Block Working Party be established to assist in this process. Volunteers are requested from the group to take part.

3.3 The next 2 Schools Forum meetings are December and January where updates will be presented to the Forum before the final DSG allocation for 2014/15 is brought to the March meeting.

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