

Schools Forum

October 17th 2014

Proposals to Address the Overspend in the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant

This report relates to both maintained and academy schools

For information only

Recommendations

- That the schools Forum notes the Business Case for reform of Warwickshire's current SEND system; and
- That the Schools Forum continues to monitor the implementation of the Business Case and associated action plan.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In June 2014, the Schools Forum agreed that an updated action plan for savings within the High Needs Block be brought to the October meeting along with a review of progress.
- 1.2 The Local Authority recognised that the pressures on the High Needs Block, particularly with regard to Out of County placements, were such that this required a named officer to work specifically on the approach to addressing the overspend. Jonathan Wilding was engaged in this role.
- 1.3 The Local Authority also began the development of a Vulnerable Learners Strategy in order to ensure that we best meet the needs of all children and young people and that they all have an opportunity to make good progress, regardless of their starting points or circumstances. In considering the actions required by the Strategy and the action plan for the overspend, it became clear that there was a need for a fundamental review and redevelopment of the provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

2.0 The Business Case

- 2.1 A Business Case has been developed to underpin the Vulnerable Learners Strategy. This Business Case provides analysis of the current budget overspend in High Needs Block (HNB), stemming from spending on Independent Specialist Provision for pupils with high levels of Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- 2.2 The Business Case also begins to identify the causal factors driving increases in the proportion of pupils with Statements of SEN in such placements. These

factors are underpinned by a wider tendency in some parts of the current system towards non-inclusive practice.

- 2.3 In developing the Business Case, it was identified that the most recent attempt to address this issue, the introduction of the High Needs Panel, has proved to be a failure with an increase in placements made since its introduction in July 2013. At the same time, however, the introduction of a High Needs Panel for post 16 education has had considerable success. There has been a reduction in the overall cost of Post 16 provision despite a significant increase in numbers. As a result, the expected overspend on Post 16 education will not be incurred.
- 2.4 It should be noted that there are significant drivers for change, other than the obvious financial pressures, including the poor outcomes for many vulnerable learners and the current statutory reforms of SEN & Disability (SEND) legislation.
- 2.5 Finally, the Business Case brings forward proposals for change leading to a desired 'To Be' model, implemented through a programme of activities under three themed headings:
- i. **Managing demand for services** – through clear communication to schools and parents setting out respective responsibilities of schools and the local authority, changes to criteria for specialist support and more effective targeting of resources to those most in need.
 - ii. **Developing capacity** – introducing a diverse range of new provision and enhancing the capability of existing provision through the identification, promotion and support for models of best practice and professional development of staff.
 - iii. **Implementation of an SEND Commissioning Cycle** – to better understand Warwickshire's needs, more effectively manage the market and implement a comprehensive review and reshaping of Warwickshire Council's High Needs Block funded provision to better address the needs of vulnerable learners.

3.0 Actions

- 3.1 A group has been established to review the current Warwickshire thresholds for the issue of an Education, Health and Care plan.
- 3.2 A review of identified, individual 'out of County' placements has been initiated through the Education Psychology Service.
- 3.3 The draft Business Case has been presented to mainstream and special school headteachers at Headteacher Business Meetings. Expressions of interest for the 'developing capacity' strand of the plan have been sought and there is considerable interest.

- 3.4 There continues to be progress with the development and opening of the new AEN School in Nuneaton. Work is underway to identify the pupils to attend the new school.

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