

REPORT TO: Schools Forum

DATE: 21 February 2018

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director – Education, Inclusion and Provision

SUBJECT: High Needs Update

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report sets out the reductions to High Needs budgets required to set a balanced budget for 2018/2019. It also signals the change in practice when applying for enhanced provision and seeks permission to make an application to the Secretary of State for exemption to the Minimum Funding Guarantee using the disapplication process.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

- 2.1 Schools Forum consider and agree options for the reduction of High Needs Funding ensuring that the budget is brought in line with the resources available.**
- 2.2 Schools Forum agree the changes to the funding of enhanced provision**
- 2.3 Schools Forum agree to an application to the Secretary of State to seek permission for exemption to the Minimum Funding Guarantee using the disapplication process.**

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 Nationally the level of demand for support for pupils with special educational needs has been increasing over recent years. However, there has not been a corresponding increase in the level of funding allocated to Local Authorities to meet this need. This position is reflected in Halton and was outlined to schools in the consultation in October 2017 and School Forum meetings in November 2017 and January 2018, as only a small increase of £73,000 was allocated to the Borough for 2018/2019. Representation was made to the Schools Minister Nick Gibb in November 2017, about the funding pressures and the impact this is having on outcomes for children, young people and families in the Borough, however, unfortunately Halton was not allocated any further funding to meet the increasing costs pressures. The expectation is that we must manage within the resources already available to us.

- 3.2 We have now utilised all our reserves to balance the high needs budget shortfall. It is therefore, no longer possible for us to continue to provide the increasing level of support requested by schools, colleges and settings and it is not sustainable to continue to increase the number of pupils placed both within our local specialist settings or independent specialist settings. We must also address the increased number of pupils excluded from both primary and secondary schools. Increasing numbers of children and young people are being educated in expensive independent provision and the costs associated with placing pupils in specialist provision such as The Bridge has significantly increased. In addition, all Halton's specialist provision is now full to capacity.
- 3.3 To more effectively meet the needs of our children and young people we will be looking to build the capacity of all early years schools and settings. Many schools and settings report that they are struggling to support children exhibiting more challenging behaviour. In response our specialist settings and support services are now developing an extensive range of CPD and support.
- 3.4 Following the review of behaviour across the borough an outcome focused action plan has been developed and a Strategic Lead identified. To provide the additional specialist support for schools and settings recruitment is now taking place for a Behaviour Support team. Once established the team will work with schools and settings as well as parents and carers to build capacity, broker and commission effective support and model and share good practice.
- 3.5 In addition, a review of service provision is being commissioned. Work is also planned to take place with neighbouring authorities to develop an inclusion charter mark. Once recruited the SEND Commissioner will undertake a review of independent placements including the costs and quality and opportunities for placement back within the borough will be explored. .
- 3.6 Letters have been sent to all independent settings advising them of the challenging financial situation and notifying them that we do not expect to see increases in their fees. They have also been asked to consider how they can reduce their current costs.
- 3.7 Following the consultation with schools in October 2017 and the School Forum meeting in October 2018 it was agreed that 0.5% could be transferred from the schools block to the High Needs Block. Prior to the allocation of individual school budgets a sum of £421,594 was there added to the High Needs budget thereby reducing the total shortfall.

- 3.8 Detailed below is the full range of savings proposals required to reduce the level of overspend in 2017/2018 and to balance the budget in 2018/2019. Please note that these savings are spread across each sector of provision.

Saving Area	Budget	Comment
Independent Provision	£398,000	This reduction will bring the costs in line with the budget which has been overspending in recent years.
Inter Authority	£80,000	Reduction in the costs of placing Halton children in other authority provision.
Pupil Referral Unit	£200,000	This is a one- off reduction to the budget. In the next few months a review of top up levels will be undertaken.
Early Years Top Up Funding	£80,000	This funding will be met from the Early Years allocation.
Behaviour Support Team	£127,930	The recruitment timeline for the new Behaviour support is September 2018 saving 4/12 of the allocated budget.
Post-16 Funding	£300,000	Funding levels for element 2 & 3 for Riverside College is capped at the same level
Equipment Budget	£20,000	Budget has been halved.
Staffing and supplies	£41,000	Reduction in central staffing and supplies.

Contingency	£8,185	High Needs Contingency budget
Special Schools	£172,000	Reduction in the level of funding to the 4 special schools back to the proposed level for 2017-18.
Reduction in top up funding for primary and secondary schools	£776,829	This reduction leave a total top up figure of £1 million.

- 3.9 As the level of reduction in budgets proposed for the special schools is above the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) of minus 1.5% all four special schools must agree the funding reduction. If that agreement can be reached locally a disapplication form will need to be completed requesting exemption to the MFG. This form must be submitted to the Secretary of State for consideration.
- 3.10 On the basis of the current level of spending commitments in 2017/2018 and assuming no further increase in commitments for 2018/2019 the savings proposed above should allow a balanced budget to be set.
- 3.11 To achieve the scale of reduction in the top up funding for primary and secondary schools when an application is made for enhanced provision the panel will take into consideration the schools balance and the level of funding allocated to the school in their delegated budget for 2018/2019. For LA maintained schools at the end of 2016/2017 there was a balance of over £3.6 million and for secondary schools a balance of over £627,000. As is the case with LA primary and secondary schools, any academy will need to provide details of their level of balance for consideration by the panel. In addition the panel will be provided with details of the funding allocated in 2018/2019 through the National Funding Formula. Schools will be expected to make provision to support all children through their delegated budget unless they can demonstrate to the panel that they do not have the resources to do. Appendix A shows the year end balances for LA maintained schools over the last 3 years along with the budget allocation for 2018/2019. Annex B shows details of the level of top up funding received by each school over the last 3 years.

3.12 Without reserves it is essential future high needs spending is contained within the budget available. Careful monitoring will be undertaken on each area of expenditure with a report on progress presented to each School Forum meeting.