

REPORT TO: Schools Forum

DATE: 15th January 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director – Education, Inclusion and Provision

SUBJECT: Independent Review of High Needs

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide the Forum with a progress report on the independent review of high needs provision in Halton.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Schools Forum

2.1 Note the report;

2.2 Support the progress of the revision and redesign of High Needs;

2.3 Consider the proposed funding of the Educational Psychology Service; and

2.4 Request a further report to be submitted at the next School Forum meeting.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 School Forum received a report on 16th October 2019 on the progress each of the three workstreams had made to date. Forum members were advised at the time that December 2019 had been set as a target for the completion of each of the three workstreams. However, given a number of local developments, the scale and complexity of the task, the need to ensure participation by all stakeholders in the proposed redesign and the sustainability of any future changes, the date for completion has been reviewed and the revised indicative target date is March 2020.

3.2 Once the work is complete the findings will be reported to the Senior Management Team of the Council for consideration and a report will then be produced for the Executive Board of the Council, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the SEND Strategic Board. If the recommendations in the report are agreed, formal consultation on the revised arrangements will then be undertaken.

3.3 However, there have been a number of issues that have emerged as part of the review and redesign which School Forum may wish to consider and take a view on so that changes can be made for 2020-2021 financial year.

3.4 Much of the valuable preventative work for schools by the Educational Psychology Service is only provided on a traded basis. Support is

therefore allocated to schools on the basis of their ability to pay not their level of need. In addition, the demand for Educational Psychology Service support has increased over the last few years. Providing more consistent and equitable support across all schools could be achieved if it was agreed that the service ceased to trade and that the High Needs budget pick up these costs. Schools would then receive support based on a formula which reflected their size and the level of need. The estimated costs of this development is £100,000.

3.5 You will have seen from the earlier report on School Forum that schools will receive a significant increase in their funding for 2020-2021. We are proposing that schools receive this funding in full and that for 2020-2021 there is not a transfer across to High Needs. This allows funding for Halton to remain within Halton and to be invested in local mainstream provision. However, we hope that schools will utilise this funding to increase their support for pupils with SEND both at primary and secondary phase and so that we can see a reduction in the demand for high cost specialist placements or the High Needs budget will continue to overspend in 2020-2021.

3.6 There a high number of fixed and permanent exclusions from Secondary schools and many of these excluded children and young people have had to be placed in high cost out of borough or independent provision. A paper will be taken to the Halton Association of Secondary Heads Meeting in February which sets out a different way of funding the PRU, incentivising schools to take up engagement places, developing outreach support and asking secondary colleagues to reinvest up to half the funding previously transferred to the High Needs budget into vocational places at the PRU. A report will be provided to School Forum in March on the outcome of the HASH meeting.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Through supporting schools to become more inclusive, streamlining the assessment arrangements and revising the offer of our specialist provision, including the PRU, it is hoped that we will be better able to meet the needs of Halton pupils through our local provision. Providing support from specialist settings to mainstream schools should ensure more children and young people can be educated within their local mainstream school alongside their peers.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 Current provision does not meet the needs of children and young people in the Borough. High numbers of children are being educated in independent provision with many pupils having to travel outside the borough to access provision. This is not in their best interest and is not sustainable.

6.2 Ensuring mainstream schools are more inclusive will reduce the demand on specialist settings and out of borough provision. Remodelling specialist provision so that it better meets local need and special schools provide places for only the most complex children and young people with SEND, reducing the level of placements in independent provision.

6.3 The newly established Placement Division will visit all independent settings checking on the quality of provision, outcomes for the children and young people and attendance. They will also review the price ensuring each placement represents good value for money.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 The aim of the task groups are to better understand High Needs in Halton so that we can improve the quality of SEND provision within the borough, the outcomes of children and young people with SEND and encourage all our schools to become more inclusive.