

Report to the Schools Forum 20 May 2021

T&W 2021/22 High Needs Budget

1 Background and Context

- 1.1 As noted in the paper outlining the 2020/21 closing DSG position, the deficit position on DSG at the end of 2017/18 has been turned around in recent years, such that at the end of 2020/21 we have a DSG surplus exceeding £0.5m. An important part of the context of this is the significant increases in high needs DSG allocated to the local authority in recent years, as follows:

2017/18	£20.150m
2018/19	£21.224m
2019/20	£21.979m
2020/21	£25.070m
2021/22	£28.139m

- 1.2 The net increase in the funds available for the high needs budget is less than the above, as prior to 2020/21, the Forum has agreed in successive years to transfer 0.5% of the schools block (equating to £0.6m) to high needs. This ceased after 2019/20. In addition, around £0.5m of the 2021/22 increase arises from moving teachers pay grants to within DSG, so is not net new money. Nonetheless, the significant increase in funding in 2020/21 and 2021/22 is clear.
- 1.3 Whilst we are in a better financial position with DSG than many LAs, it is worth noting that a £3m increase in funding in 2020/21 resulted in an in-year increase in DSG balances of less than £0.4m. This illustrates that high needs DSG pressures are real and continuing.
- 1.4 The local authority is therefore aiming to perform a balancing act with high needs. In the context of the DSG position, we wish to take advantage of the opportunity to make investments that will improve high needs provision for our children and young people, whilst being mindful of the unavoidable pressures that will continue to put require additional funding.

2 Plans and Proposals

Special School Funding

- 2.1 The number of places at special schools (which continue to be funded at £10,000 per place) remains similar to 2020/21. The additional top-up amounts for pupils bands have been increased by £660 to reflect the loss of teachers pay grants and by a further 2% compared to 2020/21.

Additional Special Units

- 2.2 Forum members will be aware that two new high needs units have recently opened, managed by Haughton but located at Hollinswood and Old Park primary schools.

These have been successful in relieving pressure on places at Haughton whilst also proving transitional provision between mainstream and special schools.

- 2.3 Three further units are due to open in September, sited at:

Wrockwardine Wood Infants. This will provide provision for Bridge pupils. It enables the school to maintain the current level of places, once space borrowed from HLC returns to HLC in September.

John Randall Primary. The school is adjacent to Haughton and the unit will provide additional space to enable Haughton to meet the continuing high demand for places at the school.

Secondary tbc The first secondary resourced provision is planned to open, an eight place unit managed by a special school but located at a secondary school.

Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) – supporting early intervention

- 2.4 The local authority has recently commissioned a review of alternative provision (AP) and SEMH provision in the Borough. A full response to the report will be developed with schools and other stakeholders (see below) but one specific issue that was raised was around the variable success of transition arrangements between the primary and secondary sectors.
- 2.5 Where these arrangements are not well developed, the transition between the primary and secondary sectors has led to some children who had previously coped in mainstream provision subsequently finding secondary schools more challenging, with associated issues of behaviour and attendance, in some cases leading to a move out of mainstream provision.
- 2.6 In order to provide support for the initial stages of adjustment to secondary schools, it is proposed to provide additional funding to provide additional support for transition to secondary school provision Term.
- 2.7 Further adaptations to the current SEMH and AP provision in T&W will be discussed over the forthcoming months and are likely to involve consideration of more devolved arrangements with clusters and MATS playing a greater role. Whilst some of this will be a redistribution of existing resources, the authority is also looking to potentially increase investment in earlier interventions to prevent specialist provision being necessary.

SEND innovation fund

- 2.8 The authority has a 'Fairshare fund' for SEN which was previously known as SEN contingency and distributes £100,000 to schools with higher numbers of EHCPs than the school demographics would usually be associated with. A formula is used which ranks schools by deprivation, low prior attainment and EHCP hours (the first 15 of each EHCP only).
- 2.9 In 2020/21 the Fairshare Fund was extended so that in schools could also apply for additional discretionary funding. In 2021/22 we will continue to encourage schools to apply to this fund, with the intention that schools shouldn't feel that they are financially disadvantaged by being as inclusive as they can. We have allocated £100,000 per

annum to the discretionary element and distributed close to this sum in 2020/21 but anticipate that the amount could increase as we aim to expand support for high needs in mainstream settings.

- 2.10 We also wish to develop, in consultation with schools and other stakeholders, a unified banding system for SEND, which extends across both mainstream and specialist provision. Over recent years we have developed a banding system for special schools, but this has been changed independently from the EHCP banding system for mainstream schools, which has not been reviewed for some time. A theme of the authority's ambition for SEND is to have a more flexible system which reduces the mainstream/specialist divide and a unified banding system would promote this aim. In the context that the amounts associated with EHCP bands have not changed for some time, it is anticipated that this will require some additional investment.
- 2.11 In 2020/21 we are also proposing to develop the local authority's support services to improve capacity and skill levels around exclusions.

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May 2021