

Forum Newsletter

SOLIHULL SCHOOLS FORUM met on 4th December 2017, the following is an overview of business undertaken

Assistant Director's Items

SEND Ofsted Inspection – Solihull has received the SEND Local Area Inspection Report and the team will be putting an Action Plan in place to respond to a number of areas.

Strategic School Improvement Fund – The funding achieved under the first round of bidding is aimed at improving attainment in maths for disadvantaged pupils. Solihull is looking to put in a joint bid with Coventry and Warwickshire for the next bidding round, prioritising Inclusion and Achievement for youngsters with SEND and orchestrated through Hazel Oak Teaching School.

School Improvement Service – The Management of Change consultation has resulted in 5 voluntary redundancies. From January, the Service will focus on signposting and quality assurance, together with the LA's statutory role of monitoring, challenge and support. A new School Improvement Strategy is currently being drawn up with SSSAB to ensure shared ownership of the function.

Pupil Number Variations for Expanding Schools

Under new rules, the LA must present any Pupil Variations to Forum to illustrate the impact on overall funding and to specific schools' budgets.

In 2018-19 seven schools will undertake expansions at a total cost of £540k. This will result in a total expected spend of £121k greater than the DSG. That figure will then become the new baseline for the following year.



Finance Work Group Report

Further to October's monitoring figures, an increase in out-of-borough placements has led to increased spend in this area. The increase is linked to lack of available places in Solihull special schools and is likely to eradicate the planned end-of-year surplus.

School Funding 2018-19 – Central Services, Retained Duties

Forum has a statutory responsibility to agree a number of areas and Steve Fenton presented these:

Growth Fund (£350k) – Will form a separate component of the Schools Block, with funding based on actual spend and paid with a one year time lag. A £100k increase has been suggested for 2018-19 to respond to current costs.

Central Services Block (£1,054,926) – Services include Admissions, Servicing of Schools Forum and Licencing Fees, plus Retained Duties which are the statutory functions the LA undertakes on behalf of all schools and academies. The LA will receive a grant of around £600k and will supplement this with around £1m from its own resources to fund a total service cost of £1.6m. Any service and associated cost removed from the programme would go towards reducing the LA subsidy, the money would not go back to schools. Members were asked to agree to the DSG grant being passported through to the LA.

Historic Commitments (£1,446,750) – These services and costs are capped at the 2013-14 level; if the service stops, the funding will cease. Previously services have been funded through a top-slice of schools' budgets, however from 2018 they will be contained within the Central Services Block and funded from a separate DSG allocation (not a top-slice). Any reduction in service and associated cost would not result in money going back to schools. Finance WG will continue to ensure these services deliver quality and value for money.

Early Years Block (£1,126,570) – The EY Advisory Team & Family Information Service are funded through a top-slice, with each £100 equating to about 5p in the EY hourly rate. It is early days for the EY Inclusion Fund which has been in place since September, 2017. The EY Contingency Fund will ensure any volatility in the hourly rate is avoided once the Blocks are ring-fenced.

De-Delegation – Maintained Schools – Primary Contingency (£100k) which pays for ad hoc items such as retrospective teacher pension fund applications and staff exit costs and TU Facilities Time (£123,550) where the proposal is to maintain the current level of £7.50pp next year whilst the LA undertakes a review.

The mood of the meeting was full approval of the centrally held services, delegations to maintained schools and the level of growth and contingency funds.



School Funding 2018-19 – General Duties

Under the new NFF, the LA has a range of statutory functions and duties to undertake for maintained schools which were previously funded through the Education Services Grant. The expectation now is that maintained schools will fund these through a top-slice, to be approved by Forum and as allowed for in the new regulations. Last year Forum agreed to top-slice maintained schools based on a part-year calculation. For 2018-19, the case was presented to top-slice maintained schools based on the DfE rates – mainstream schools £66pp, PRUs £247.50pp and special schools £280.50pp, totalling £1.361m and leaving a shortfall of £408k which the LA will subsidise from its own resources. As schools academise, income to the LA for General Duties will reduce, as the funding transfers back through the academy route, which the LA will have to manage. Maintained Forum members voted in favour of accepting the £66pp top-slice for mainstream schools. However special schools were extremely unhappy at the level of proposed increase, explaining the detrimental impact it would have and it was agreed that this would be revisited for special schools and PRUs, with an alternative proposal brought to the 18 January Forum meeting.

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College Update

John Callaghan updated Forum on activities taking place, including:

- There has been growth in the 16-18 cohort at Blossomfield and Woodlands and a significant increase in professional courses, but adult education has declined following changes that allow only unemployed adults to receive funding.
- New courses include an intensive Construction Course, in response to anticipated shortages in this area, short courses for English and Maths and teaching in hybrid and driverless technology, virtual and augmented reality and the College hopes to offer an MSC in Aircraft Maintenance next year.
- Pre-16 engagement is growing, with students, often with behavioural difficulties, attending day or week release where the college environment often proves beneficial.
- The College has an extensive offering for students with SEND and is open to working with the LA to potentially locate some specialist provision on-campus.
- The merger with Stratford College is expected to be finalised before Christmas, expanding the offering for students living in south-east Solihull and including a range of creative arts.

Capital Work Group Report

The Group received updates on the School Organisation Plan and the Asset Management Plan.

Ministerial Visit and Contact with Local Members of Parliament

In November Schools Minister, Nick Gibb and Dame Caroline Spelman visited St George and Teresa School. Des Foxon explained the focus of the visit and presented an overview of the difficulties his school is currently facing.

On 24 November David Lewis and Antoinette Fisher met with Julian Knight MP to discuss areas currently in focus for Forum and SSSAB. This will be followed up through Forum Executive and SSSAB.

Education SEND Group Report

- There has been long-standing concern around post-16 pathways and the group will continue to pursue a solution.
- The number of children going out-of-borough is increasing again for a number of reasons. The priority is to draw up a strategy to expand special school and ARC places and work with Solihull's Alternative Provision around their pupils with behavioural difficulties.

Solihull Schools Strategic Accountability Board Report

- The group was pleased that the cost of TU Facilities Time will be reviewed and alternatives investigated.
- The group is seeking clarification on admissions criteria for alternative provision.
- A full programme has been confirmed for next term's Heads' Conference and uptake for places has been high.



Full minutes and papers are available to view and download on the Solihull Schools Forum website at:

<http://socialsolihull.org.uk/schools/forum/schools-forum>