

Forum Newsletter

**SOLIHULL SCHOOLS FORUM met on 10th December 2019,
the following is a précis of business undertaken**

Scheme for Financing Schools

Forum was asked to approve the Solihull Scheme for Financing Schools, which included only minor changes and applies only to maintained schools. Members raised some questions about the limits imposed on primary and secondary reserves. Rather than enforce the 8% (primary) and 5% (secondary) limits, Solihull's approach is to monitor balances and work with schools to ensure they have a clear financial strategy for utilising their reserved funding. Steve Fenton agreed to produce a briefing note about this as guidance for schools.



Message from the Director of Children's Services

Steve Fenton delivered Louise Rees' written message, which included

- Following confirmation that the Council will not be seeking to submit a disapplication request to the Secretary of State, Louise Rees restated the Council's commitment to working with schools to develop the Borough's approach to SEND provision, funding and the deficit recovery plan. In the meantime, the Council is progressing the appointment of a new Assistant Director for Inclusion and Additional Needs.
- The three-week Ofsted inspection of a number of elements of Children's Services concluded on 25 November 2019. The draft report is expected on 9 January, however early feedback from the HMI has been positive.



Full minutes and papers are available to view and download on the [Schools Forum website](#).

Cabinet Member's Update

- The updated School Organisation Plan, which includes potential options for creating additional in-borough SEND provision, would be presented at Cllr Meeson's Decision-making session for approval on 18 December 2019. There would be a separate report on SEND School Place Commissioning and an update on the Capital programme.
- In relation to the Government SEND policy papers circulated from the f40 group, Cllr Meeson agreed with most of the suggestions made by Kent, but had reservations about its proposal for restricting special school provision to pupils with only the most extreme needs. Solihull's policy has always been to have a range of provision to match to individual children.

School Funding 2020-21

Central Services, Retained Duties and Historic Commitments

- With a 20% reduction imposed on Historic Commitments from April 2020, equating to £290k, Steve Fenton explained the proposal to remove Sports Management/Federation (£27k) and Collaborative funding (£60k) from this Block, to be financed instead by schools. The LA has agreed to input £150k in order to continue the remaining services. It was noted that, as it appears to be the Government's long-term aim to remove the Historic Commitments grant, this will impact Prudential Borrowing (Solihull's mortgage to fund the re-build/renovation of north Solihull schools). Solihull therefore intends to challenge this with the Government.
- It was proposed that the Early Years Inclusion and Contingency Funds continue at the same level next year.
- It was proposed that TU Facilities Time (de-delegation for maintained schools only) be reduced from the current £6.50pp to £6.00pp for 2020-21, based on continuing the trajectory towards a final cost of £5pp.
- Forum agreed all recommendations relating to the above.

General Duties

The LA is required to seek Forum's agreement to top-slice maintained schools to fund a range of statutory duties undertaken by the Council. It was proposed that the current rates of £66pp for mainstream schools, £165pp for special schools and £165pp for PRUs, be retained for 2020-21. This equates to £1.182m, against an estimated cost to provide services of £1.914m, with the LA subsidising the difference. Forum agreed to the top-slice.

Group Reports

Reports for EdSEND and SSSAB were delivered and accepted, with no questions raised.

Finance Work Group

Members wanted to understand the next steps, now that the disapplication to top-slice funding from Schools Block in favour of the High Needs Block was no longer going ahead. The following points were made:

- The LA will take a Recovery Plan to Full Cabinet on 13 February, which will include final DSG data and robust information on demand and impact of current and future requirements.
- It was stressed that there is no intention to bring young people back from external placements and place them inappropriately in Solihull mainstream schools.
- A robust and early process will need to be in place for placing young people in the ASD Free School to avoid losing places to other authorities.
- A number of additional resources are being explored, including reviewing the EHCP process and support available in mainstream schools; the work of the joint SISS and EP High Needs SEMH team, including a rapid response arrangement for young people at risk of exclusion; the Inclusion Fund which has helped to identify children's needs earlier and aids transition and managing parental pressure and expectations through the EP team and dedicated legal advice.
- It was noted that the Local Offer <https://socialsolihull.org.uk/localoffer/> is updated regularly and is an important source of information.