

SCHOOLS FORUM

Newsletter

Summarising business undertaken at a meeting held on 7th October 2020

Cabinet Member's Items

- Councillor Ken Meeson thanked schools for their work throughout the challenging Covid emergency. Pupils returned to schools very quickly in September and Solihull's attendance data is amongst the highest in the region.
- Some concerns have been raised about the rising number of parents choosing to electively home educate (EHE) their children: if they later change their minds and there is no school place available; schools not receiving funding for children re-joining part-way through the year; the quality of education provided and safeguarding issues. These are long-standing concerns, but it is a parent's legal right to home educate and the LA has limited powers to intervene.
- Councillor Meeson noted that the promised Government SEND Review had been delayed again.

Assistant Director's Items

- Tim Browne provided the latest school outbreak data; the numbers are low and the over-riding message is that schools are a safe place to be.
- Tim will shortly publish his Re-shaping Education vision paper to stakeholders. This will open discussions about the Council's future role in education, how we address challenges and achieve successful outcomes.
- Charlotte Jones has been appointed Head of SEND, starting on 25 November. Interviews for the START Manager are planned for late October and the START team will shortly be fully staffed, but may require further boosting.
- Work has commenced on implementing a SEND casework management system which will be fully functional by spring 2021. This will bring enormous benefits, strengthen processes and enable greater interaction with schools and families.
- The Parent Carer Voice is now operational with Heather Delaney as acting Chair.
- The Consultation on the proposal to close Summerfield Education Centre is now in the public domain and it was noted that the provision, several months on from the last Ofsted inspection, is much improved and very different.

High Needs Recovery Plan Update

The Head Teacher Reference Group will reconvene on 22 October to consider the new plans. The six key strands of the plan are Commissioning Strategy, Inclusion Strategy, SEND Processes, Financial Strategy, Annual Reviews and Graduated Pathway (the final two areas being added recently).

DfE Announcements

Steve Fenton highlighted five key points:

- The LA will not be seeking a top-slice from Schools Block to the High Needs Block for 2021-22. Increased High Needs funding (£2.5m in 2021-22 and £2.5m in 2022-23) will bring Solihull closer to closing the in-year funding gap and the High Needs Recovery Plan will consider the approach to paying off the accumulated c£8.4m deficit.
- With Forum's consent, the LA will continue to emulate the National Funding Formula in school budgets as far as possible for 2021-22, adjusting the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) to manage any shortfalls.
- Special schools will be treated in a similar way to mainstream.
- Forum is asked to support central funding at historic levels, with no inflationary increases.
- No formal announcements have been made yet for Early Years, but the funding strategy proposed will be to passport through any increased funding to providers in the hourly rate.

Forum approved this proposed funding strategy for 2021-22.

Solihull Scheme for Financing Schools

This is the financial framework document for maintained schools only, which includes two 'directed revisions'.

- Extension of the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) insurance scheme to maintained schools from 1 April 2020. Further information will be brought to Finance Work Group on 26 November.
- From 1 April 2021, submission of an annual 3-year budget forecast and implementation of an arrangement whereby any school facing a deficit budget of 5% (the threshold can be lower) must submit a Recovery Plan to the LA. Solihull already has a robust budget forecasting system in place and works to a £5k threshold at which recovery discussions are instigated. Maintained members agreed to retain the £5k limit and Steve Fenton will send the revised Scheme to schools shortly.

Group Reports

Reports for Finance, EdSEND, SSSAB and Capital were delivered and accepted.