

**FINANCE WORK GROUP
REPORT TO SCHOOLS
FORUM
On Wednesday, 19 May 2021**



Date of Work Group meeting: Monday 26 April 2021

Items discussed (brief summary of key items):

Minutes and Matters Arising - The minutes were accepted. DL raised two issues:

1. Capital Work Group, chaired by Andrew Wilkins, has not met this year due to absence of the lead officer. Stuart McHale reassured members that matters were in hand and full reports should be available for the next meeting on 1 July.
2. The School Bursar Newsletter had been circulated to group members for information. Future issues will be circulated to members as they become available. It was noted that no interest will be paid on school balances this year.

2020-21 Financial Out-turn Figures (Stuart McHale) - Additional Covid and HN planning work had led to a delay in finalising figures for the meeting. However, SMcH confirmed that both the Schools Block and Central Block were largely to budget, as was Early Years, although the final funding allocation will not be known until July. The High Needs Block deficit continues to grow, partly as a result of information brought to light through Annual Reviews and improved systems leading to quicker processing of placements. It is anticipated that the annual deficit will be £3.1m (increased from £2.8m in February) and an accumulated deficit of over £9m. It is expected that the deficit will increase further before matters improve.

Termly Report on Payments to Independent and Private Providers (Steve Fenton) - March 2021 figures were presented, showing a pleasing fall in overall costs between January 2020 and March 2021 of £680k, but a rise between November 2020 and March 2021 of £208k, with an attendant rise of 20 pupil placements during this period to 156. Members requested for a profile of pupils involved in order to gauge long-term costs and the additional cost of transport. SF was complimented on the data presented and agreed to provide further detail for the 17 June meeting.

HN Recovery Plan (Stuart McHale) - SMcH referred to the considerable amount of work being done within the authority at strategic and management level. The Covid crisis has had a major impact on progress, both in terms of delays to timelines, including to the bringing on-stream of the new ASD school and ARP provision and increasing demand for services and its impact on budgets. Members involved in the Head Teacher Reference Group spoke well of what they had heard and felt that action was taking place. It is hoped that a more detailed presentation will be available for the 17 June meeting.

School Catering (Paul Wayman) - Solihull School Catering is the LA catering service that operates as a trading organisation and which most primary schools and some Solihull secondary schools buy into. PW responded to a number of questions raised at the 1 February meeting and reported that issues around poor communication with schools should be rectified with the planned appointment of a Relationship Manager. Problems with invoicing, particularly for academies, was recognised as a difficulty that PW is working to resolve. He confirmed that most schools will shortly be back on full menus.

Pupil Premium (Steve Fenton) - SF explained that shifting eligibility dates from the January census to the earlier in the academic year October census, would cost Solihull schools around £659k based on the previous year's data.

Procurement Update (Chris Lowe) - CL reported contract updates for Insurance, First Aid and plans to involve schools with the Grounds Maintenance contract. Members spoke disappointedly about the attitude of Veolia to collection of recycled material and the poor example set when materials separated out by schools was then, at collection, mixed in with general waste. CL will raise this with Environmental Services' colleagues and ensure it forms part of any future contract negotiations. Finally Chris spoke about the Government Green Paper, the outcome of which is due in the Autumn.