

**FINANCE WORK GROUP
REPORT TO FORUM
FOR PRESENTATION
AT FORUM ON 12th JULY 2021**



Date of Work Group meeting: Thursday 17th June 2021

Items discussed (brief summary of key items):

Matters Arising

Recycled waste collection (Chris Lowe) - Contact had been made with Veolia by CL over the failure to distinguish recycled waste from general waste on collection from schools. Veolia said this was due to staff shortages during COVID and separation did take place at the depot. This will continue to be monitored.

School Catering (Paul Wayman) - Lynn Clark had been in further contact with PW over the appearance of deficits against schools which was a central admin accounting problem and not of the schools' making. Catering will be invited back in the new Academic year to monitor this problem.

Procurement Update (Chris Lowe) - CL reported considerable work on renewing central contracts with regard to IT, Stationary, and Schools Ground Maintenance. He stressed the desire to involve schools in this process, and most contracts had been extended for one or 2 years during COVID.

Final Out-Turn Monitoring Statement for 2020-21 - Review DSG Financial Monitoring Statements (Ian Murray) - IM tabled the General DSG Grant for 2020-21 and the 2020-21 High Needs Block. While most DSG budgets are within the parameters set, the High Needs deficit continues to increase to an overall anticipated deficit for the year of £3.2m. and an accumulated deficit of £9.1m. Compared with outturn figures for the previous 2 years there had been a fall in the cost of out of borough placements of £700k, but over budget rises in contractual services, top up funding and post 16 funding. In all these figures there is evidence of rising demand for placements, better monitoring of current provision, time lags in getting borough provision on line and of work needed through the revised Recovery Plan. It is anticipated that with spend to save activities the deficit will rise before getting better, and the new planned provision at Solihull Academy and Summerfield will add to the HN demands on DSG spending.

Termly Report on Out-of Borough Independent and Private Placements (Steve Fenton) - SF tabled a more detailed paper which included details of new placements in 2020-21 (58), Transport costs (est. annual costs of £879K), and placements out of Borough by year. The latter showed that of the 163 placements: 21 are for Reception and Primary age pupils, and 121 for Secondary, of which 66 are in Years 10 and 11. Another table showed for post 16 College placements there are 110 pupils in June 2021 of which 30 are in Borough. There was detailed discussion around placements and the difficulties with the time lag in bringing new provision on line and the discrepancy between the growth in demand and the lack of provision even after the new provision comes on line. While it is acknowledged that there will always be a demand for out-of-Borough placements, the ability to bring back pupils could be difficult without an increase in Inclusion.

School Admissions Service Report (Nicky Eatherington) - Admissions is a statutory responsibility on all schools and in Solihull all schools and academies use the Borough's scheme (academies buy the scheme). The service handled some 50,000 phone calls and 30,000 e-mails in 2020-21. The number of appeals for places was 223 with 7 being successful. The challenges for the service continue to include: shortage of places in Reception, families moving into the Borough mid-year – approximately 1300 applications, many from overseas and nursery places. A noticeable change this year has been the decline in applications from Eastern Europe and a rise in those from Hong Kong, with a switch from north to south of the Borough. As always it is only with the excellent co-operation of head teachers that the system manages. An annual payment is made to this service of £260k. Against these problems the Solihull service works on a basis of £6 per pupil against a national average of £9 per pupil and a regional average of £9 per pupil. Solihull is believed to be among the lowest funded figures in the country and the second lowest in the West Midlands.

Maintained School Reserves (Ian Murray) - The annual report showed a £1.3m rise in reserves, with no individual schools in deficit. This is a snapshot figure.

Administration (Alison McWilliam) - Tables were published for Membership, dates for next year's meetings, David Lewis was recommended to act as Chair for 2021-22, Andrew Wilkins was absent for the meeting but will be asked to act as Vice Chair. Ratification of Chair and Vice Chair will be made in September.