

SCHOOLS FORUM

Newsletter

Summarising business undertaken at a meeting held on 4th October 2021

Assistant Director's Items

Tim Browne updated members on a number of items:

- The Council's new Reshaping Education arrangements commenced 1 September 2021 and it is anticipated that all posts will be fully staffed by January 2022. The new Structure comprises five service areas: Commissioning for Learning, Education Outcomes and Intervention, 0-25 SEND Service, Inclusion Service and Commissioning for Children and Young People.
- In July Cabinet Member approved £1.5m additional funding, allowing the EHCP team to almost double in size to cater for increased demand and improve service performance. The number of EHCPs completed within the statutory 20-week period now stands at 83%, well above the national and regional average.
- Pressure on the High Needs Block continues, with £2.9m overspend in 2019-20 and an accumulated deficit of £12m and Tim cautioned that financially, matters are likely to worsen before they start to improve. A High Needs forecast will be taken to Cabinet in December to reflect on the improvement journey and anticipated spend over the next three years.
- The Joint Additional Needs Strategy will be presented to Cabinet in December and the Accessibility Strategy, Inclusion Strategy and Alternative Provision Strategy will follow shortly after.
- Members heard that, despite an 19% increase in specialist in-borough provision in recent years, Solihull still has insufficient specialist places. However, the ASD free school, due to open in September 2023, will make a significant impact, together with provision delivered through the AP Strategy.

DfE Announcements – School Funding 2022-23 and Beyond

Steve Fenton presented key areas from the paper:

- The Government headline is 'the largest cash increase for schools in a decade', with an additional £7billion in 2022-23, when compared to 2019-20.
- For 2022-23 core factors will increase by 3% as a guaranteed baseline, with every school receiving a minimum 2% uplift in per pupil funding. This does not apply to special schools or alternative provision and Schools Forum will be asked to approve a similar uplift for these settings from increased HN funding.
- Business rates will be handled centrally for academies and ESFA will bill Local Authorities.
- High Needs funding will increase by 9.6% (£780m), with every authority receiving a minimum 8% increase. Solihull will receive an 8.1% increase, an allocation of £2.7m. Although this is welcome and will support stabilising in-year spend, it will not reduce the accumulated deficit, due to continued growth in both demographics and complexity of need. A national solution is required to respond to this.
- The NFF Consultation has now closed. F40 submitted a comprehensive response.
- There will be a change in the regulations and treatment of deficits, with Schools Forums no longer required to approve any transfer of funds between Schools' and High Needs Blocks. Instead, any surplus on the Schools or Early Years Blocks, once all NFF factors have been met, can automatically go to the HNB. In recent years, Solihull has had insufficient money in its funding allocation to fully emulate NFF factors and a scaling back of the AWPU has been required in order to meet all funding factors. It is therefore unlikely that Solihull will generate any surplus that could be used in accordance with the new rules.
- The LA has no plans to propose a transfer between Schools' and HNB and under a hard NFF, this would not be an option.
- Information is awaited on whether the Government will fund the increased NI contributions or whether this is expected to come from the 3% uplift.

Alternative Provision Strategy

Michele Sadler presented a discussion document setting out where AP fits into the education landscape, what schools and the LA need from it, what the gaps are, routes in and commissioning arrangements. Plans are moving forward for Solihull Academy's involvement with Summerfield and further input is needed with secondary colleagues around access to AP vocational courses and with primary colleagues on what primary AP might look like.

Group Reports

Reports for Finance and EdSEND were delivered and accepted. It was noted that SSSAB and Capital were scheduled to meet after Forum (reports will be made available on the Forum website).

Chair's Items

Darren Gelder reminded members and the wider education community that Schools Forum and its work groups provide an opportunity to raise questions and seek answers in support of education for the Borough's young people. Contact schoolsforum@solihull.gov.uk

For more information please contact us at: schoolsforum@solihull.gov.uk or [click here](#) to visit our webpage.