

SCHOOLS FORUM

Newsletter

Summarising business undertaken at a meeting held on 25 November 2021

Acting Director of Children's Services Items

Tim Browne updated members on three items:

- Nationally, Children's Services are facing significant demand for services, particularly in the area of Children's Social Care. Indications are that the number of looked after children could reach 100,000 by 2025; a 36% increase over the last ten years and there continues to be a huge shortage of placements. Solihull is recruiting additional social workers and putting additional Assistant Director capacity in place in response to need in this area.
- Two SEND reports would be presented to Full Cabinet on 9 December; one requesting formal approval for a number of strategies associated with Additional and Special Educational Needs, the second detailing the SEND improvement journey and 3-year High Needs budget projection. Solihull's 3-year projection is a £22m deficit by 2024-25. However, assuming a conservative annual £2m a year Government funded uplift, an in-year balance could be achieved by 2024-25, with an accumulated deficit of £15.7m. The Government SEND Review is expected in Spring 2022. Cabinet reports can be accessed [here](#).
- A Government White Paper is also expected in Spring 2022, which will include future funding arrangements for the LA's role in school improvement.

School Funding 2022-23

Forum approval was sought for a number of budgetary elements:

Centrally Retained Services (all schools)

Growth Fund - £350k to respond to the need for bulge classes. The LA is currently experiencing significant pressures in secondary admissions and is exploring the possibility of having no places in certain year groups. This will be revisited in January, when an increase to the proposed £350k may be required. In the meantime, Forum was asked to approve funding at £350k.

Central School Services Block – Forum was required to agree passporting through the £1.364m grant to the LA for it to undertake its statutory functions (including Retained Duties) in respect of all schools, regardless of status.

Historical Commitments – The only remaining item in this budget area is Prudential Borrowing, the mortgage payment for the north Solihull schools' regeneration programme, which at £1.115m exceeds the grant by £223k. Government has agreed to cover the shortfall through Grant Protection Funding.

Early Years Block – For 2022-23 it is proposed to maintain funding for all EY Block areas at existing levels. This covers the EY Advisory Team £253k, Other EY Services £289k, Family Information Service £257k, EY Inclusion Fund £250k (plus £90k from the HN Block) and EY Contingency Fund £130k.

De-delegation (applicable to maintained schools only) – Primary Contingency Fund £70k/£6.40pp for school-focused expenditure, predominantly linked to school re-organisations for budgetary reasons and TU Facilities Time £55k/ £5.00pp.

General Duties (maintained schools only)

Maintained school members were asked to approve a financial contribution (top-slice) to cover statutory General Duties at a rate fixed a number of years ago and subsidised by the LA. The proposed rates for 2022-2023 remain at £66pp for mainstream schools and £165pp for special schools and PRUs.

Cabinet Member's Items

Councillor Richard Holt presented a brief overview of a number of areas, including planned provision for excluded children and young people at Castle Bromwich Youth Centre; focus on reducing the number of children and young people placed in out-of-borough provisions for both economic reasons and in the best interests of young people; the need to overcome delays in the system, particularly with Health colleagues for children and young people with Autism; the range of strategies currently in process in support of children and young people with both additional and special educational needs – whilst continuing to manage on-going Covid and financial difficulties.

Inclusion Service Report

Michele Sadler presented a status report on the new Service, implemented under the Reshaping Education programme, from 1 September 2021. Significant progress has already been made, with around half the workforce already in post. Key areas of focus for the Service include monitoring attendance, including for Solihull children educated out of the Borough, ensuring all children and young people have access to suitable full time education, overcoming challenges around Elective Home Education to ensure education being delivered is suitable and preparing a formal Consultation on the Borough's Alternative Provision offer.

Group Reports

Only Finance Work Group had met at the time of the meeting, the report for which was accepted with no questions.

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