

Forum Newsletter

**SOLIHULL SCHOOLS FORUM met on 8th February 2017,
the following is a précis of business undertaken**

Early Years National Funding Formula

Final ratification will be sought at the March Cabinet Member's meeting for the increased EY funding rates of £3.80pp for schools (including 60p deprivation) and £3.90pp for PVI settings, to be implemented from 1 April 2017. This will then be communicated to schools.



Cabinet Member Items

Councillor Ken Meeson reported on the recent Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull School Games and the Schools' Public Speaking competition. Both events were extremely successful, with a high calibre of participants.

£ Finance Work Group

It was agreed that a £300k shortfall in pupil growth funding would be met in the short-term from the forecast underspend. This will be recovered next year, when the additional DSG money comes in.

The overall plan is to retain an end-of-year surplus of around £500k, emanating predominantly from an underspend on the HNB. However, there continue to be pressures on out-of-borough placements, post-16 and pupil growth (as above), so the expected surplus could be less.

The SEND and Capital Work Groups did not meet during the period.

Solihull Schools Accountability Board

Heads had raised concerns around the SEND agenda and funding of SISS services and this is being looked into.

Assistant Director's Items

- There has been a good response to the LA's Education Services Questionnaire at a time when schools are unsure of their own priorities, budgets and the potential cost of traded services. Early review identified safeguarding, HR, financial support, H&S, admissions and sport as strong areas for schools, with mixed views about catering, payroll and pensions. A full analysis will be presented to the 3 April Forum meeting.
- From 1 April 2018, Solihull will receive full-year funding of £190k (pro-rata'd from 1 September 2017). This is considerably less than the current arrangement and will mean reducing the service to focus purely on its statutory responsibilities of monitoring, intervention and brokerage. A Management of Change programme will commence before Easter.
- For each school that converts to an academy, the LA has a significant drop in centrally retained funds to provide services for its maintained schools. Ultimately there will be a tipping point at which time it is no longer financially viable for the LA to service a very small number of maintained schools. An exercise is being undertaken to gauge schools' intentions to convert in a bid to forward plan service delivery.

Stage 2 National Funding Formula & High Needs Consultations

The Stage 2 Consultation was issued on 14 December 2016, with a deadline to respond of 22 March 2017. The LA and Forum will both respond, but anyone can submit their own response and Forum encouraged everyone to do so.

- The proposals could be viewed as a failure in terms of 'fairness' with inequality cemented in as a result of the 3% floor.
- Although overall Solihull will receive an additional £3.6m, this is less than the £5-6m anticipated.
- The majority of Solihull secondaries will gain between £300k and £500k per school; a rise from a very low level starting point and insufficient to cover increased costs and cuts in ESG funding.
- It is a tragedy that ¾ of Solihull primaries will lose money. When added to the 8% drop (National Audit Office figure) in school funding (due to increased staff costs, apprenticeship levy, reduced ESG, etc.) this will undoubtedly lead to staff redundancies and result in reduced standards of education across the Borough.
- The formula makes no reference to the basic cost of running a school.
- The 3% cap on losses means that Solihull and Birmingham are still funded at vastly different unit rates. This was one of Solihull's biggest concerns.
- For High Needs, Solihull would lose £2.5m. However the Government has said that no authority should lose money, so Solihull will have a static HN budget. Even so, this will be tight when taking into account pupil growth and the increasingly complex needs of pupils.
- Members raised their anger, disappointment and frustration at the outcome and declared the current level of education in Solihull to be unsustainable under the NFF proposals and general funding cuts.
- Members felt that every avenue should be pursued in response to the proposals, including lobbying through the f40 Group, through Councillors, local MPs and the Press. Schools will be writing to parents to make them aware of the funding crisis and case studies demonstrating what the cuts will mean for individual schools are being gathered.
- Forum will hold an Extra-ordinary Executive meeting to formulate its response to the Consultations.