

Slough Schools Forum December 6th 2016

Special Educational Needs: High Needs Block 17/18

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report updates the financial position affecting the SEND elements of 2017/18 High Needs Block (HNB).

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 As most schools will be aware, both the funding for pupils with high-level special needs and the number of places at local Special Schools and Resource Bases in mainstream schools have been under significant pressure for some time. As at mid-January 2016 there were 957 pupils aged 16 and under with Statements of SEN or Education Health and Care Plans. By the end of September there were 1,089, with a further 100 aged 17 and over.

2.2 At the start of the current financial year, there were three areas of significant backlog of work within the SEND Service (managed by the Children's Services Trust since October 2015). These related to new Education Health and Care assessments being not completed on time; requests and recommendations for changes arising from annual reviews of pupils with Statements not being actioned and insufficient work undertaken to 'convert' Statement to EHCPs.

2.3 Progress has been made in all three areas, but the service is not complacent about the scale of what still remains to be done

2.4 Because specialist provision in Slough is currently at (or over) agreed capacity, more children and young people are attending schools in neighbouring areas and there are also more children who are attending fee-paying schools related to their social care needs and placements.

2.5 As part of the first round of monitoring spending within the High Needs Block for 16/17 a significant projected overspend had been identified, which was in large part a result of spending falling into this financial year which related to costs incurred by schools and others in previous financial years.

2.6 Clearly this situation has to be managed to reduce the projected overspend and to manage out the problem in this year and over future years. The next section of this report updates Schools Forum on a series of actions underway as part of the 'Recovery Plan' for the High Needs Block

3. WORK TO DATE

3.1 As outlined at the October meeting of Schools Forum, there are a range of options to be considered to address these issues, the first of which is already underway and consists of a joint Trust and SBC examination of the HNB budgets on

a line by line basis. This is ongoing and to date has focused on independent sector placements and top-up payments to Slough schools.

3.2 The two organisations have made significant progress since October, reducing the projected overspend from approximately £800k to £300k. However this work is not yet complete so this latter figure may increase.

3.3 Some of the options set out October are not being actively pursued – for example the roll-forward into 17/18 of costs from this year. The October report also made clear that there were other options likely to produce minimal or no short-term savings to the HNB – for example the placement of pupils in out-of-borough state schools. This too is not being actively considered.

3.4 A detailed review is underway of out-of-borough independent sector placements, but any changes to these (other than ending the placement altogether) are unlikely to produce significant savings in the current financial year.

3.5 Work has not yet commenced to model possible reductions in the financial value of the top-up funding bands, but this is an option that will need to be pursued and discussed with the HNB Task Group, but will not impact the 16/17 budget.

3.6 At this stage no formal approach to the DfE for additional financial support has been made by either the Trust or SBC, as suggested at the October Forum.

3.7 The detailed Recovery Plan has yet to be drafted and shared with the HNB Task Group. The first meeting of that group will now be re-arranged for January 2017.

4. LONGER-TERM ISSUES

4.1 Given the 2016/17 situation re lack of capacity at Special Schools and Resource Bases, there are a number of suggestions under discussion and proposals in development to invest capital resources in Slough to increase capacity

4.2 The costs of school places at Special Schools and of the majority of the cost of a place at a Resource Base are met in full from the HNB. The size of the HNB is determined based on a formula rather than pupil numbers, so (unlike the Schools Block) increases in school capacity are not matched by an increase in the pupil funding within by the HNB.

4.4 In short, any increase in capacity as a result of capital investment, may have no revenue stream to support it, but we have to make those investment decisions now if the additional capacity is to be in place two to three years hence.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 See section 3 above

6. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

6.1 Schools Forum Report October 13th 2016

7. ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

7.1 Not applicable at this stage, but all proposals to be included in the proposed Recovery Plan will be the subject of detailed consultations with senior officers in Slough Borough Council Legal Services and Finance as well as with the Schools Forum HNB sub-group. The independent Consultant will report to the Council by end of December.

8. CONSULTATION

None at this stage

9 RECOMMENDATION

Schools Forum is asked to note the current projected 16/17 overspend on the SEND-related elements of the High Needs Block.

This is likely to form the basis of a requirement to transfer funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block for 17/18, the details of which will be submitted to the January meeting of the Forum.

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