

SCHOOLS FORUM
HIGH NEEDS SUB GROUP
MEETING HELD ON 1 OCTOBER 2015

PRESENT: Diane McConnell, Sue Symington, Pete Ewart, Maryssa O'Connor, Karen Norton, Shona Randle, Jane Harvey, Graham Waller and David New.

SECRETARY TO SCHOOLS FORUM: Elaine Barrett

1. **WELCOME / INTRODUCTIONS**

D McConnell welcomed members and thanked them for their attendance. It was noted that K Norton had been invited to participate in the meeting in her role as a NLE and part of the Teaching Alliance. Members gave introductions.

2. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

RESOLVED that S Symington be appointed as Chair of the High Needs Sub Group.

3. **HIGH NEEDS ISSUES**

Members referred to the previously circulated document, as appended to the minutes and discussed on 7 July 2015 at Schools Forum. J Harvey outlined that it had now been two years since the new High Needs funding had been agreed. There had been a number of changes in that time which had resulted in an increased pressure on high needs funding and therefore a timely review was needed.

D New confirmed that there had been an increased spend from £20 million in 2013-2014 to over £23 million in the current term. It had been highlighted that the Delegated Schools Grant (DSG) would flatline through the next Parliament however the demand on the fund would continue to rise. Members noted that an additional £800,000 had been provided for high needs this year although this was non recurring as a result of two year funding which had not been allocated. The process for two year old funding had now moved to allocation per place taken and therefore there would be no additional funds available through this stream.

Reductions of a minimum of £1 million would be needed moving forward however this was in an environment of increased demand through both Schools referrals and planned places.

J Harvey outlined that the system for application for high needs funding was overly bureaucratic and time consuming for Schools including referral paperwork and panel applications. This needed streamlining. It must also be considered that through the new EHCP system, parents could apply for some of their child's personal budget although as yet there had been no applications. However this would need to be taken into consideration moving forward.

J Harvey confirmed the current system was reactive and needed to be more proactive including reviewing SEN support provided in School before specialist provision was sought.

A further consideration was equity across all settings, currently all providers received the same amount including Special Schools. This needed to be reviewed.

G Waller highlighted that there was a level of uncertainty regarding future national funding agreements moving forward. Currently the LA uses some Schools Block funding to support the High Needs block. However it was uncertain if this would be

allowable in the future.

D New confirmed that this was a national and regional issue, with Newcastle LA undertaking a similar review. Members agreed that any feedback from Newcastle's review may prove useful for Stockton Schools Forum with regards to a new high needs system moving forward.

M O'Connor questioned the time restraint with regards to the minimum £1 million saving needed against the knowledge of pupil needs. J Harvey confirmed that a timeline would become clearer once the high needs review had moved forward.

As part of the SEN reform, clearer routes were needed particularly with regards to the Health sector. J Harvey would be meeting with the CCG representative to discuss data exchange.

S Randle questioned the national context. It was agreed that nationally there was an increase in the numbers of children with identified SEN. K Norton agreed that within her own setting there were six children diagnosed with autism however were unable to find specialist spaces in the LA. These children had to be supported within their own School with one to one support and then a referral for top up funding. It was agreed that a review of Additional Resource Base (ARB) places was required.

J Harvey agreed that a review was also needed of the quality of plans and support already offered across settings as there were inconsistencies.

4. EFA – PUBLICATION OF 2016 – 2017 HIGH NEEDS FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

G Waller outlined a tabled document summarizing the DfE guidance on High Needs Funding for 2016 – 2017 as appended to the minutes. A link to the DfE documents was provided. Members noted that any change in the number of funded places needed to be reported to the DfE by 16 November 2015. It was also reiterated that there would be no growth funding committed in HN until a spending review had been completed later in 2015. A consultation was underway in the way non maintained Special Schools were funded.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE / SCOPE

S Symington confirmed she would prepare a draft terms of reference document to be addressed at the next meeting. The scope would be as included in the appended document Item 7.

6. PROGRAMME OF WORK / TIMETABLE

Members agreed that a benchmarking exercise needed to be undertaken to provide the current picture financially both in spending terms and context to other LA's. A review of top ups was needed with regards to the number of successful applications per setting and the reasons why some settings secured more top ups than others.

Members agreed that an additional HN project group should be convened to undertake the reviews needed in order that all points could accurately be considered. This would include:

- Data set / allocation of funding;
- National comparisons;
- Method of allocations / banding including proposals of new models;
- School interface funding / reviewing process / panel process;
- Include the current SEN project work underway with J Harvey's team.

Members discussed having the input of SENCO's in the working party. Joanne Mills

would be a valuable resource and it was agreed that specialist staff, including external partners, would be invited to participate in meetings where necessary. The initial meeting would have a reflective agenda and confirmation of the timetable of meetings including a project plan.

7. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no further urgent items of business to discuss.

8. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that:

- a) a meeting of the High Needs Project Group would be held at 11am on 9 October 2015 at Thornaby Academy;
- b) a meeting of the High Needs Sub Group would be held at 9.30am on 23 November 2015 at St John's the Baptist CE Primary School.