

WIRRAL COUNCIL

SCHOOLS FORUM 18TH JANUARY 2017

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

HIGH NEEDS CONSULTATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the outcome of a local consultation with schools on High Needs Funding for 2017-18, describes some recent developments and recommends a number of minor changes.

BACKGROUND

The previous Forum report in September summarised the current position with regard to High Needs and described a number of changes in both pre and post 16 provision that were being considered for 2017-18. These changes have since been the subject of a consultation with schools and providers.

The consultation paper is attached (Appendix 1), and ran from 31st October until the end of term. In total 14 responses were received – 3 primary schools, 3 secondary schools, 6 special and 2 post 16.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED.

Questions 1 to 5. Should the place number changes be made as described to Special Schools, Specialist Bases, Alternative provision and Post 16?

The responses to the planned changes were supported with very few exceptions. Some schools commented on the need to limit places to those students with a clearly defined high level of additional need. Where provision is closing there were comments that recognised falling numbers make provision unsustainable but that where this is the case arrangements must be in place to meet the continuing needs of any remaining students.

The current 2016 and planned 2017 place numbers are summarised in Appendix 2 . The changes have been built into the Schools Budget and have an additional cost of £165,600 in 2017-18 and a further £199,000 in 2018-19.

Question 6. Should the notional SEN budget be increased?

Wirral's notional SEN budget is tightly defined and limited to low cost high incidence SEN (prior attainment data) a recognised proxy indicator for SEN. Most schools receive an allocation through the funding formula, however there are some Grammar schools that do not, despite additional needs being identified

The responses to this question were not consistent. Half schools agreed that the notional budgets should be increased, half did not and no schools commented on the frequency that the 90% guarantee is calculated.

No changes are proposed to the Notional SEN budget at this time. The position will instead be considered alongside the National Formula consultation and the changes to be introduced in 12 months time.

Question 7 How can Wirral manage the growth in costs for IPFA's, Statements or High Needs generally?

The comments to this question ranged from reduce the unit value or the number of units awarded, this cannot be achieved where there is a rising population and that spending reductions may need to be made elsewhere. There were also comments on the need for early intervention and that investment may enable a long term reduction in high cost placements.

The challenges presented in the affordability of High Needs are recognised both locally and nationally. Given the limited flexibilities available in the future costs will need to be managed within an amount that is likely to be set with little flexibility. The budget for 2017-18 does not propose to top slice unit values or top ups at this time and the growth requirements identified of £1.2m for next year have been mostly funded. However there is as a result temporary funding within the budget, fewer contingencies and less reserves. There is an urgent need to provide a secure budget framework to meet identified needs. The recent EFA notification of £132,000 grant funding for Wirral to undertake a strategic review of High Needs is timely and will help with this.

Question 8. This concerned the payment of Double top ups and a proposal that this should only be paid where pupil numbers exceed planned place numbers. Most responses received supported this proposal, with only one disagreeing commenting that these payments are needed to maintain a stable staff team, however others commented that changes in year should be managed through staff reorganisation instead. It is recommended that this change should be implemented.

Question 9 A proposal to limit Exceptional Needs allocations to an annual decision making panel.

Although some did comment on the merits of this, particularly in terms of budget planning, few responses supported this change. Schools commented that they need to make suitable provision to meet needs. Without funding, or sufficient reserves this increased the risk of failure, harm and placement breakdown.

No changes are proposed at this time, Exceptional Needs will continue to be reviewed and arrangements discussed locally and regionally.

Recommendations

1. The agreed place changes are made with effect from September 2017 (Orrets Meadow having already been implemented)
2. Double top ups are paid only where place numbers are exceeded (from September 2017)
3. There are no changes to the definition of the Schools Notional SEN budget or the systems allocating Exceptional Needs.
4. That the Forum and High Needs Working group consider plans to support a strategic review of provision and resources.

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