

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM 14th June 2022

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

High Needs Working Group Update

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The high needs working group has met on the 8th November 2022. The focus of the meetings has been to discuss the on-going pressure in relation to the high needs block, increased demand on special school places across the local area, the approach being taken to review IPFA funding and the DFE program Delivering Better Value.

2.0 IPFA review update

2.1 The Assistant Director – Education shared the workstream 4 report from the SEND transformation board related to the IPFA review – forecasted £2.6m expenditure in 2022-2023.

2.2 The pilot project identified within the report was shared with the group – with an expected end date of April 2023. The pilot will also look at transition of pupils from year 6 into secondary school provision and any challenges identified.

2.3 Feedback from the group made clear that the pupils' needs should be demonstrated, with the opportunity for an annual review and the option for fixed 12-month funding replacing IPFA at the appropriate time.

2.4 It was made clear by the group the concern that EHCP numbers would increase as part of this work. It was shared alongside this work; the SEND assessment team are currently reviewing a high number of EHCP's in post 16 to identify if plans needed to be ceased. The relevant communication is taking place with young people/parent/carers.

2.4 Colleagues raised concerns regarding the 12-month funding due to EHCP completion times and it was made clear this could be looked at. The group also shared the view that the priority should be year 6 pupils to support transition.

2.5 It was agreed that as part of the pilot project, a strategy would be written regarding a new approach without IPFA's – this would be shared at the next appropriate high needs working group.

3.0 Provision for young people with an EHCP that cannot be accommodated on Wirral

3.1 Katy Bird – Head of SEND, shared with the group the current challenges the SEND assessment team are facing placing a number of young people with an EHCP.

3.2 The group discussed the view of schools in relation to needing to know the funding a young person would receive prior to making a decision. In addition, Katy discussed cases where the LA had to direct schools to take young people with an EHCP. Colleagues agreed this needed to be avoided where possible. The request was made to develop clear principles regarding communication with schools prior to this decision being made.

3.3 The group then discussed further areas to be looked at that could support meeting the needs of children where specific themes have been identified by the SEND team. Colleagues agreed an agreed set of non-negotiables should be developed alongside the principles for communication, for example everyone agreed CLA with an EHCP should be the highest priority,

3.4 Further updates were then shared via LA officers, currently the LA commissioning team are developing SLA's for special schools and mainstream with a resourced provision/base. In addition, 6 out of borough providers are working with commissioning to develop better placements.

3.5 The group discussed the importance of reviewing the current cohorts of Wirral young people with an EHCP and make sure the current provision is meeting the required needs.

3.6 Finally, the group discussed the importance of including the provision of AP on Wirral as part of the work to support blended provision between providers. They also discussed the low exclusion rate on Wirral and if Progress Schools is currently under utilised due to the size of contract in place.

3.7 they agreed the following actions –

- Helen Hayes from SEND commission would attend the next High Need working group.
- A strategy to be developed regarding the route to direction for children with an EHCP.
- An alternative provision steering group with wider engagement from school leaders to be established.

4.0 Newton Europe – Delivering Better Value review

4.1 The Assistant Director – Education shared the presentation document provided by Newton Europe for the DFE Delivering Better Value – to address the high needs deficit balance.

4.2 It was discussed the review would look at the current use of Wirral's High Needs block to allow comparison with other LA's that have also undertaken the same review. It was outlined the DFE are completing this review for all LA's with a deficit High Needs Block. The work will be completed in three phases, with Wirral falling in the last group.

4.3 The final report will be shared with Schools Forum once completed, it was made clear the review would not be looking specifically at provision on Wirral but how the High Needs Block is utilised.

4.4 Asako Brown – Finance Business Partner – Education shared that more information regarding the review would be available prior to work taking place in the New Year.

4.5 The group agreed it would be helpful for Simone White – Director of Children's Services to attend the next meeting to discuss this review further. The action was taken to share the invite.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Forum notes the report.
2. That Forum receives a further report in the spring term from the High Needs Working Group

Simone White
Director of Children, Families and Education