

High Needs Block Working Group Meeting – 9th November 2021

Present

Sean McKeown, Lisa Percy, Sarah Garbutt, Helean Hughes, Cate Mullen, Marie Taylor, Grant Davis

Minutes of last meeting

High Needs Budget Plan - Communications – all happened with Sue Ellison

Provision mapping – Cate Mullen awaiting a Cheshire East decision about providing us with their model. They offer a complete 'Toolkit', but we are only requesting a small part of their package. They are currently re-working their Provision Mapping model and we are awaiting their decision as to whether we can adopt their model. – CM awaiting decision and to update in due course.

Sarah Garbutt has joined the SEND Board.

Temporary Support Funding (TSF) – CM

CM shared her proposal regarding TSF on screen for the group to see. Sean and Lisa are the first school colleagues to see the TSF model.

CM outlined the issue of meeting the statutory 20-week requirement for EHCPs. Unfortunately, due to national and local recruitment issues, Education Psychologist (EP) resource is in short supply which is causing delays in meeting the 20-week deadline. Whilst significant measures are being taken to recruit additional EP resource, there is an immediate issue for meeting the 20-week deadline.

The proposed TSF model would see £5k paid in recognition of no EHCP being issued within the statutory period, funding equating to the midpoint between Bands Upper 1 and Lower 2. This would apply to all EHCP's initiated since the 1st September 2021 and paid in three tranches' during the year, one each term, in line with Named Pupil Allowance (NPA) payments. A new payment process would be established. Once an EHCP had been formalised then the funding would move across to the correct EHCP Band. There would be no plans to recoup for 'over-funding' or pay additional monies for 'under-funding'.

The same requirements would apply in terms of following the statutory EHCP process but to help with current 'time lag' and gap in funding, the TSF funding issued to schools would provide interim financial support.

In terms of cost, the proposal is cost neutral to the High Needs Block. Either an EHCP would be issued with banded funding or the TSF would be payable.

Questions / Comments

LP – what can be accessed with the funding? Is it directed or just going into a school's budget? Monies should be to provide support in the interim period – it is extra monies designated for the specific pupil?

CM – The funding should be treated as with any EHCP funding – used to support the pupil.

SM – an example of how the funding would work would be useful – this will avoid a number of further questions. The FAQ is helpful.

LP – use one example across ELP/RB/SS

SG – clear documentation and then an example would be really helpful for all schools

SM – how will the TSF be communicated to schools? – HH - through Heads Briefings / Govs Briefings, then Newsletter, so should have good coverage.

HH – funding would apply to plans initiated from 1st September 2021 – SG questioned timeline as there was a bulge before September and wondered whether the number of applications that were already in the pipeline – will they be covered or missed? CM - Need to quantify and refer to the numbers in progress, but we could look at covering the pre-September bulge.

Agreed it should cover the pre-September cases too.

MT – keeping scheme simple hence using the £5k – some instances where schools may be over-funded for low banded pupils – there is a risk that schools may put in higher level of provision than can be afforded through banding, when EHCP is issued.

LP – what happens if school arranges extra support e.g., Equine therapy, but then can't afford it afterwards – just need to be clear that funding is one-off through the TSF, pending a final banding. Also, what would happen if no plan is issued – school has had funding? – MT – No recovery will be made

CM – there is an emphasis on putting in place sustainable support, more than what's currently in place for the pupil.

HH – is there is a cost to the HN budget?

MT – possibly a minor proportional overpayment, hence using average banding. Paid termly so minimising period of any overpayment.

LP – do we align funding with a banding e.g., Upper 1 at £4,067, so work at £4,000?

SG – Opportunity to reinforce the use of Notional SEN budgets.

Agreed – use £4k was agreed and can then roll-back to prior to 1st Sept cases too.

Agreed - Issue a worked example, to be shared with schools

Agreed – TSF to be included in Briefings, Newsletter and then communicated with SENCOs too.

This will only be a **temporary measure** until we reach meeting our stat responsibility of 20 weeks, whilst EP recruitment continues

CM to cover off at the Briefings

Budget Monitoring - MT

No huge differences to data presented to Schools Forum at their October meeting. There is always a data lag so we may expect spend to increase over time and the financial impact of the EHCP bulge is not fully quantified yet.

There is a projected underspend in the Growth Fund which will help towards the High Needs overspend.

Early Years Budgets – An overall underspend within early years may benefit their sector – this is a difficult formula to project but there is always a ‘catch-up’ in the ensuing year. If there is any capacity to fund additional training / resources, then this may be possible from the separate ringfence moving forward.

Ordinary Available Provision (OAP)- CM

CM led through link to ‘beta’ test/development site. OAP started last year as a Wilts focussed resource, not just schools and set out what is available for learners with SEND, for parents, schools, and all parties.

The new Wiltshire Local Offer site was presented, and new sections shared – Section 3 taken from the Graduated Response Model. Section 2 based upon Portsmouth model (SG has fed back to Andrew Morrison, after working with Lyssy and suggested that there was some repetition which will be looked at.)

SG - Focus on Teacher Standards summarises lots of information – link to the School Improvement Framework. We should not rely on the Portsmouth model for our site.

CM – SEMH needs more work, and the site is not finished yet, more links to real life examples are required but it is a huge step forward.

SG – happy to help with work on the OAP

CM – link has been shared with schools in September but not had full feedback yet – it was felt that more productive feedback comes from workshops that have been run with schools.

DfE Scrutiny – High Needs Recovery - MT

MT – It feels like the DfE have led us a ‘merry dance’ with false starts in terms of our information provided. Where Wiltshire had provided the documentation and plans behind our High Needs Recovery journey, the DfE have now insisted that they want us to complete their Recovery Plan Models.

MT has started to complete their ‘document’ which is hugely time consuming. Only the Exec Summary needs to be shared with Schools Forum but there is a huge amount of supporting information behind the plans.

MT worked through the ‘Mitigations’ in the Exec Summary including.

- Possibly setting up our own ISS - purchasing one (Supported by Council’s Director of Finance)
- Extra places in Special Schools, new free School in the south of county
- 0.5% transfer from Schools Block to High Needs Block
- £5m uplift in HN funding each year
- Extra HN Capital for creating new places (confirmed in The Chancellor’s Budget and Spending Review for 2021)
- Reduce EHCP numbers / rate – HH&LP – can more be ceased; LP has ceased plans and gave an example. Also, can we engage with College about their numbers and shifting the ‘mindset’ in families and with pupils.

- SM – The achieving of a plan is the ‘panacea’ for families, and they don’t want to lose the ‘security blanket’ of a plan.
- SG – what can be done to help the transition between mainstream and resource bases. CM – need to slow the growth, but seeing more growth in EY settings
- LP - SEMH discussion – not everyone knows what to do about SEMH and there is an unmet need and no AP provision in place – needing turnaround plans which help. ‘Project SEMH’ is not working for all – geographic location to support the schools in the west of the county. College provision is not focussed on SEMH.
- Alternative Provision - Need a rep to join the working group about accessing Project SEMH. LP to speak to North Heads to try and find a rep to push for support for the North.
- SG & LP – what is put in place before an EHCP?
- Transformational culture change – HH & MT to look if funding to help change ‘mindsets’ and shape something up – possible use of transformation funding?

Next steps “finalise” finance areas of the plan and share with operational colleagues to sign off prior to sharing with DfE.

Regional Dataset – CM

- CM presented the group with some tables and statistics from the south west. Benchmarking data is always lagged so can easily be out of date – The SEN2 data is from 2020-21, so is historic and therefore Cate presented some 2021-22 data from Quarter 1, to the group, which is more up to date.
- The information shows the rate of children with an EHCP per 10,000 pupils -Wiltshire is above the SW Average and our Statistical Neighbour Average.
- The data also shows how many EHCPs are turned around in 20 weeks and shows Wiltshire in a below average position compared to both SW, National and Statistical neighbour averages.

LP – On a positive note, this shows the starting point and then it will be helpful to show the data of how we improve

SM – what will it look like by Qtr. 4? – CM, timeliness will be lower than the 41%, so we will move backwards, before we see any improvements. HH – lots of mitigating actions being taken

CM – lots of scrutiny around performance but we are working equitably with all EHCPs. Some LA’s may be ‘tactical’ about their EHCP caseload to help with statistical performance, not showing the true underlying position. Wiltshire works fairly through all its EHCP’s.

AOB - none