

# FINANCE WORK GROUP REPORT TO FORUM

10<sup>th</sup> July 2025



**Date of Work Group Meeting:** Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2025

**Items discussed** (brief summary of key items):

**Minutes and matters arising:** The minutes from 06.05.25 were approved.

## **DSG Outturn 2024**

The following were highlighted for the HN Block:

*Pupil support services:*

- SISS slightly underspent on staffing
- transport overspent – increase in direct payments and more pupils receiving support OOB
- Alternative Provision over by £500,000 – may be due to opening of a primary PRU
- Variance of £384k for Solihull mainstream top-ups
- £761k on independent school places – affected by price increases and pupil growth
- £300k increase on Post 16 not unexpected
- Specialist placements forecast as 7.4% - outturn showed 7.6%
- £2.6 million on specialist placements

Key questions / comments from the FWG:

- Are we tracking attendance at the expensive OOB placements now? 9 out of 154 children at OOB placements are recording zero attendance - costing £400k. Attendance figures have been obtained from most settings sharing data with SMBC but one provider has now been instructed to oblige, due to a change in legal requirements this year.*
- What is the cost of going to tribunal and losing? Can SMBC predict if going to lose? Exact figures were not available for the meeting. SMBC have a dedicated officer paid £50k plus on-costs, holding weekly meetings with the EHCP team, legal and others to triage throughout the tribunal process. SMBC wouldn't go to tribunal if there wasn't sufficient evidence otherwise. A lack of special school places being available may result in schools taking on too many children and being ineffective and fail due to demand. SMBC have 85% of cases going to tribunal, compared with 98% nationally.*
- SMBC win between 15-20% of tribunal cases compared with only 2% nationally. There are cases in Coventry of parents pulling children out of school as they're not happy with places offered.*

## **DSG Management Plan: initial draft mitigations**

Key highlights:

- Potential expansion of two existing SMBC settings should add an additional 56 SEND places, with potential expansion of an additional SEN school may result in another 50 SEND places.
- 218 additional places across the next 7 years through a conservatively proposed 18 new, 12 place ARPS with phased delivery and opening.
- Need to increase number of local placements and reduce the cost of independent placements and their resulting increased transport costs as they sit OOB.
- These are draft mitigations following the DSG Management plan timeline - with discussions taking place Sept/Oct 25 and then finalised plan ready by end of the year (Dec 25) for submission in Jan 26.

## Education Strategic Plan (ESP) overview

ESP came into force in April 2025, coordinating projects and support required for schools in a coherent way, focussing and prioritising work in key areas, whilst also reviewing several service areas including SISS and Music Service. Work already undertaken by ESP was shared via slides.

Key questions / comments from the FWG:

- a) CAIPE initiative will offer schools match-funding, as agreed by cabinet member for Education. This will support schools in the North, with a £20k pilot project supporting attendance, then £150k per term is available (Spring 26 / Summer 26) for schools to work collaboratively together, showing tangible impact on DSG Management plan re improvements in progress, presence and attainment. Mechanism to request funding being shared at next SSSAB meeting and Headteacher's Partnership, with bidding pro-forma to be provided in due course and a project weighting system to be established.
- b) Are there any mitigations for those settings with larger pots of funding being accepted for the CAIPE match-funding, whilst schools with a bigger need may not have sufficient resources? *The mechanism isn't fully agreed yet but would rely on schools working together, allowing schools to suggest a best way of working with no fixed parameters suggested by SMBC.*

## Solihull and Coventry High Needs allocation analysis

Key highlights:

- a) If Solihull were allocated HN Block funding in same manner as Coventry, Solihull could have potentially received an additional £30 million over the last 10 years, matching Solihull's current cumulative deficit.
- b) No clear rationale or explanation for the discrepancy in funding across the councils and not just HN Block receiving more funding from the government but assumptions are that this might be due to deprivation, size of council as well as an historic spend formula being used.
- c) Resolving the spending review will not impact on current funding, however SMBC are lobbying on funding in general as part of f40 campaign.

## Independent School Placements' Spend

Key highlights:

- a) Snapshot of data provided not projected costs – includes mainstream placements however leavers from colleges not included in the data.
- b) 13% increase in pupil numbers but reduction in cost as more pupils are placed. Expecting costs to increase later in year.
- c) Costs show placements within distant LAs - SMBC incur costs of placing looked after children in foster families outside of the borough, as required by the DfE – for example in Wales and Monmouthshire.
- d) Parents electing to educate their child in a private independent setting receive top-up funding from their LA to cover the cost of any EHCP plan but costs are minimal and less than £10k minimum of going to a tribunal.
- e) Pupils aren't placed in a mainstream independent setting unless directed to by outcome of tribunal.

## Attendance process for OOB Independent schools & returned attendance data

Key Highlights:

- a) 154 children were placed in OOB placements across 59 settings in 17 different LA's.
- b) Of the 9 pupils with zero attendance - 5 have 50% or more unexplained/unauthorised absences that are not medical. Remaining 4 pupils have medical explanations for their absence.
- c) Of the 30 with severe absence below 50% - 11 have 50% or more unexplained/unauthorised absences.
- d) The 9 permanently absent pupils are costing £415.5k at end of Spring term 2 – not clear if this includes any agreed/negotiated tuition off-site from provider if not accessing provision on site.

## **Home to school transport summary: May 2025**

### **Key highlights:**

- a) This report was shared for information only at this meeting but forms part of a wider Transportation Plan going to Schools Forum.
- b) The transport costs are highly subsidised by the LA and the budget has increased this year, with room for growth due to increased number of EHCPs.
- c) There's an assumption that all pupils attending OOB are transported in solo taxis which is incorrect. Solo taxis are mainly due to only child attending that setting, they cannot combine with other pupils or other mitigating reasons.
- d) Solo taxis affect 3% of pupils and cost 18% of total spend.
- e) SEND transport accounts for majority of £7 million spend, with mainstream school bus service at only £1 million.
- f) Costs are constantly reviewed and efficiencies made where possible.
- g) More local SEND places within the borough would alleviate these associated costs.
- h) An FWG member asked that income (parents paying for bus passes) be included on costs if not already included.

### **Procurement and Procurement Act update**

The FWG scrutinised the changes to facilities contracts and also was informed of changes that the Procurement Act 2025 brings to procurement processes for maintained schools and academies.

MWJ Firmstone 01.07.25