

FINANCE WORK GROUP

REPORT TO FORUM

27th March 2025



Date of Work Group Meeting: Tuesday 4th March 2025

Items discussed (brief summary of key items):

Minutes and matters arising: The minutes of 17.12.24 and 09.01.25 were approved. The minutes from 17.09.24 were agreed now that the funding provision maps report from section 11 had been removed. This area will form a separate discussion between FWG members and LA officers.

Monitoring Report – IM: Report received as read.

Independent Schools placements spend – BT/SF: SF updated that the number of independent school placements has risen from 160 in January to present number of 183. Of that, there have been 123 new KS4/KS5 placements since April, predominantly based in Birmingham and Warwickshire. The business case for the Heights was that those numbers would decrease. They will come down as the Heights fill more year groups, although the Heights does not have post-16 pupils.

Discussion took place about the huge costs of placing these children, sometimes so far out of their catchment area. It was recognised that this is due to no SEND provision in Solihull, but when parents win their tribunal, and are backed by the courts, they are able to choose a school of their choice and that can be outside of their area. Parents will usually have to also make a contribution if it is a traditional private school rather than specialist.

Early Years Annual Report – LM: LM advised that the EY team supports quality EY and childcare, special education needs support, home support as well as transition support. They support 304 settings in total and are supporting the expansion of 2-year old funding for working parents. Although there has been a slight decrease in the number of special educational needs, settings continue to be challenged by the amount of needs in terms of numbers as well as the higher needs of children who need a lot of support. Solihull has not lost as many providers as other local authorities nationally. By offering support to everyone, it is easier to support and identify quality at the early stages. Hopefully, that is reflected in the amount of good and outstanding provisions we have. In terms of outcomes we are in a good position compared with national and our local statistical neighbours.

Early Years Inclusion Fund Report – LM: This fund is focused on supporting children with emerging SEN needs in nurseries. There has been an overspend again this year. There are a variety of levels of funding, in which some new arrangements have been introduced. Funding could help with specialist toys or even release time work with teams or families to help make the transition. Nurseries can also apply for the Level 1 or 2 inclusion fund or an equipment fund. SISS would normally identify and complete an application form. There have been some lovely comments about the impact that funding has had on settings and on the children.

The education, health care (EHC) funding is not part of the inclusion fund, as this is for emerging special needs. The team automatically fund at level 2 inclusion fund, where a child has a needs assessment agreed, so they can concentrate their efforts on the EHC plan. As soon as the EHC plan is issued, the funding comes from the EHCP team rather than being taken out of the inclusion funds budget. Ideally, the team would want EHCP funding to have an extra band in ie, Level 2.5 that would be equitable and similar to schools who would receive an increase in funding when a child gets an EHCP issued. This would benefit childminders, private voluntary settings and school nurseries. LM thought that some funding has been put aside for this, where DSG has been taken out of inclusion fund, and

some additional funding has been allocated towards that. SLT have agreed in principle but wanted it to be brought to the meeting as part of inclusion fund report to obtain that formal agreement.

A recommendation from the FWG was agreed for the proposal to go to Schools Forum. The FWG supports it in principle, but needs to understand the impact on the high needs budget.

Family Information Service Annual Report – RR: the annual report which covers different areas supporting several statutory duties. There has been a 4.3% increase in total enquiries by phone and email. 40% of enquiries are about funded childcare. There is also lots of work supporting the HAF project and FSM vouchers, which generates lots of extra phone calls.

The government have expanded funded childcare for working families to include lower age groups. From April 2024, this included 2-year olds of working families. Next year it will include the other age groups. In the summer term, there was an additional 1097 children taking up places for 2-year olds from the Working Families initiative on top of the existing 2-year old families who qualify under either the benefits criteria or vulnerable child criteria. The team are monitoring this to ensure there is no impact on those disadvantaged children not being able to find places. They work closely with Early Years and Ann Pearson in Place Planning around the sufficiency side. This knock-on effect has meant funding in the summer term increased to £3.7 million for two-year olds previously having been £1.7 million

The team work with 81 schools who are signed up to the traded service of free school meal support, to check data is up to date and correct, to ensure children are receiving their correct entitlements and schools are maximising their take up of pupil premium.

There have been two additional members of staff in the team, supporting outreach support for the community which has helped a lot of families understand funded childcare and helps to build relationships with schools, family hubs and community venues.

Procurement Update – KM: Report taken as read.

The Procurement Act 2023 came into force on 24th February 2025. The LA and schools need to be aware that their purchasing policy should be updated due to a change in process of tendering of large goods and services over the threshold of £214,904.

AOB:

EHCP costs and Provision Maps to form a separate discussion between FWG members and LA Officers.

It was noted that no details of support funding for the rise in Employers' NI contributions effective from April 2025 had yet been published for schools from the ESFA.

MWJ Firmstone 18.03.25