

# Notes of High Needs Funding Sub Group

4 March 2024 – 15.30 – 17.00

**Present:** Paul Walker (Chair), Adrian Hines, Kellie Knott, Zoe Heywood, Katrina Harverson, Rob Gammon, Jamie Stone, Penny Hammett, Rob Gasson, Keith Bennett, Kieron Kilbride, Heidi Watson-Jones (notes)

**Apologies:** Mat Thorpe, Adrian Fox, Fay Bowler, Alan Blackburn, Alex Walmsley, Sarah Pickering, Gemma Rolstone,

		Actions:
1	<p><b>Finance Update</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The group noted a DSG overspend of £40.9m at month 10, an in-year overspend of £16m. Management action of £20.2m had been assumed, of which £14.6m has now been identified as at risk of not being delivered (from the previous management action plan).</li> </ul>	
2	<p><b>EHCP Process Review and data findings</b></p> <p><b>SEND Statutory Team Process Review:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update requested at the last meeting on the current position regarding the volume of EHCPs in the system.</li> <li>A project, led by Kieron Kilbride has been understanding and mapping processes currently used within the SEND statutory team with a view to developing and implementing both short term and longer term strategic improvement.</li> <li>The group heard how the SEND Statutory team has been challenged by low timeliness of issuing EHCPs, communication, relationships with parents/carers and schools, and staff absence and wellbeing concerns.</li> <li>A process review has resulted in identification of 'no added value' activities within the team which will help the team to save time and allow focus on priority tasks to move EHC assessment requests through the statutory process.</li> <li>It is intended that changes will be managed strategically going forwards to ensure impact and success, initially through temporary redirection of inbound calls to the DCC Customer Service Centre, and developing tactical tools to support improved ways of working within the statutory team.</li> <li>The group considered the impact of reducing the volume of outstanding EHCPs, generating a greater increase in Plans within the system. Kellie Knott confirmed that the full number of EHCPs, including those in the current backlog, had already been included in the Safety Valve projections submitted to the DfE.</li> </ul> <p><b>EHCP Data:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The group noted the volume of incoming EHC needs assessment requests continues to grow, in spite of efforts to work differently. This was illustrated by geographical area, and year by year.</li> <li>The proportion of parental requests for EHC needs assessment is growing over time (43% so far this year compared to 29% in 2020) and now account for almost 50% of all requests.</li> <li>Requests from schools and settings generally seem to be more successful largely due to the evidenced graduated response, although it was noted that some schools are submitting EHCP requests of which a high proportion are being refused. Based on the data, requests from parent carers are more likely to be refused than those from schools or other agencies.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The group felt it would be helpful to jointly consider why the request rate continues to rise overall, and how practice differs across the county.</li> <li>• It would also be interesting to analyse where parental requests could be being submitted as a result of their child's school deciding not to request an EHC assessment.</li> <li>• A correlation was suggested between lower school funding levels and the number of EHC needs assessment requests across LAs nationally. Poor schools funding impacts on TA recruitment and subsequently reduces support available in the classroom.</li> <li>• The LA recognises that in addition to fair funding levels, effective early help services must be made available and wrapped around schools to improve support for young people and families.</li> </ul> <p><b>Addressing the Issues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephone calls into the team to be temporarily managed by the DCC Customer Service Centre to free up the team. Caseworkers will continue to communicate with families.</li> <li>• Additional plan writing capacity to be brought in, from April initially for 3 months, to process assessments.</li> <li>• From March, the SENCO helpline will be repurposed and expanded into a bookable support for schools' consultation with a multi-disciplinary team. Subjects for consultation will include a conversation prior to submitting an application, or following a refusal to assess.</li> <li>• Further conversations will be planned in due course to review and consider a different approach to high needs banding funding, once the work on ordinarily available provision is complete</li> <li>• Agreed to collectively consider how best to communicate key messages to the wider schools leadership community. Kellie to share data at the upcoming DSLS Schools Briefing in the first instance.</li> <li>• Need to understand why parents are more motivated to request EHC needs assessment, and identify any possible link to children not attending their local school due to perceptions around inclusive behaviour.</li> <li>• <b>ACTION: Kellie Knott and Paul Walker/ Adrian Hines to consider how key messages can be communicated to schools and Governors.</b></li> <li>• Schools can be encouraged to explain to parents why they have determined that an EHC assessment application would not be appropriate, to ensure that the right children are going through the process and to help parents' understanding.</li> </ul>	<p><b>KK, PW, AH</b></p>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>Commissioning Alternative Provision</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCC looking at an overarching plan around Alternative Provision which includes workstreams within the SEND Transformation Programme to address a range of issues including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice, inclusion and early intervention / early help</li> <li>• Quality assurance and commissioning framework</li> <li>• Sufficiency and capacity building</li> </ul> </li> <li>• It is recognised that unregistered AP is currently being commissioned too frequently, often inconsistently and at significant cost. A needs analysis is being developed to ensure we understand which learners are accessing AP and how their needs can best be met.</li> <li>• 'Quick wins' to be identified to ensure different services can contract more consistently with key providers in the short term.</li> <li>• Needs analysis will underpin a strategy to ensure that the right provision is being put in place to meet children's needs effectively.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is part of a broader piece of work looking at financial processes, ordinarily available provision and the commissioning of independent settings.</li> <li>• The recent DSLS survey of schools' use of AP has helped to inform the work, and it was felt that a strengthened commissioning strategy will be of benefit to all.</li> <li>• Heads agreed that schools would be keen to engage in the strategy development. This could result in better quality provision being accessed with greater value for money.</li> <li>• The group considered if there could be a link between some parents applying for statutory plans to support an alternative educational offer for children who are struggling in a mainstream setting.</li> <li>• The revised approach will explore how AP can be effectively used to provide shorter term support to better enable children to successfully learn with their peers in their local mainstream school.</li> <li>• The strategy will be able to provide clarity of outcomes for the children accessing the AP is needed.</li> <li>• Further update to be provided at the next meeting <b>ACTION: Zoe Heywood.</b></li> </ul>	<b>ZH</b>
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**Future meetings:**

Monday 20 May – 15.30 – 17.00 (Teams)

Monday 24 June – 15.30 – 17.00 (Teams)