





limited effect in 2022/23 and the earliest likely date for a full hard NFF seemed to be 2025/26.

Consultation closes 30 September 2021.

## **5 High needs block issues including update on high needs block working group**

### **Discussions with DfE**

LM reported that officers had met with DfE representatives and had taken them through Surrey's DSG deficit recovery plan. Officers had felt it was in the right place and that the main themes were in line with DfE expectations, eg reducing use of NMI provision and increasing inclusion. The DfE had been particularly interested in the relationship between the LA and the Schools Forum. The DfE has been asked to share good practice from other LAs, but that had not been seen by the DfE as their role. They might organise facilitated discussion sessions for local authorities, but officers noted that local authorities had existing networks through which there could be such discussions, for example through the County Councils Network, of which Surrey's Leader was now the leader.

Surrey had had the 23<sup>rd</sup> highest DSG deficit (in percentage terms) of all LAs when the five LAs were selected for the 2020/21 safety valve discussions. Surrey's deficit had moved higher up the rankings since but was still unlikely to be among the top five deficits for 2021/22 discussions.

Officers and members would continue lobbying on the need for more funding and reform of the SEN system.

The work of the special schools working group had shown that “co-production” was important.

Health support was a concern and health representation on the group would be welcome.

Implementation was planned for September 2022.

The Family Voice representative asked for clear communication of proposed developments to parents and that there should be a “co-

### **Alternative provision**

The Cabinet had agreed an alternative provision strategy and capital investment in the pupil referral unit estate in order to meet needs. Currently providers were making outstanding provision in accommodation which was not fit for purpose. There would be increased emphasis on outreach and on supported return to full time mainstream education.

### **Future programme for the high needs block working group**

LM proposed that the group should continue to work over the next two years on:

- Expanding specialist places

- Completing the special school banding review and the mainstream SEN funding review

- Embedding the AP strategy

- Inclusion work, including thinking about bold pilots, trying different solutions and measuring outcomes

- Early years: there was a need to consider further how early years children could be supported. Further details would be provided in September.

The Chair noted that the high needs working group had arisen from a suggestion by Schools Forum and the need to keep Schools Forum updated of SEND transformation

### **Additional resources for school led solutions**

The Chair had had discussions with Jack Mayhew (Chair of Athena MAT) who had proposed that resources should be allocated for school leaders to manage collectively within a locality or quadrant to make SEN provision which would break the current cycles and encourage inclusion. School leaders would be accountable for it and there would need to be checks and balances on governance to ensure that children's needs were met. The costs would fall withi



fund. The Forum was not being asked for a decision now, but to advise whether the proposals were clear.

The maintained nursery school representative had expressed concern that the proposals suggested a loss of specialist nursery places and that a small proportion of children needed specialist early years places and would then have nowhere to go. If specialist places were only funded when occupied, some providers would be unable to retain specialist staff.

CS advised that, in order to allow retention of specialist staff, it had been agreed that once a child was placed as a result of an Early Years Inclusion Pathway (EYIPP) then funding would be agreed and guaranteed for the full academic year or until that child moved on. It was generally expected that children with SEN would be placed locally in mainstream provision, alongside their neighbours, with a package of support within the school and/or professional support from outside. Specialist places would not be removed unless there was provision to replace them. Maintained nursery schools were seen as centres of excellence which the LA hoped to use to upskill the remainder of the early years sector. Special schools with nursery places might have a similar role.

Sue Lewis asked whether the early years DSG underspend was being used to support the high needs block and whether using the underspend in this way required Schools Forum approval. CS replied that the DSG was in overall deficit but that the council had not formally applied the current early years underspend to offset part of the high needs deficit. Sue Lewis saw it as important that the early years surplus was not further increased.

CS doubted whether there would be an underspend in 2021/22, given the pressures on the inclusion fund.

A recent consultation with providers had shown high satisfaction with the use of EIF. 100% of professionals had thought that EIF had improved collaborative working.

Justin Price reported f1 0 0 1 4(q)-3(u)-3(ir)5(e)-3(d)-3( )8(S)-2(ch)-3(o)6(o)-3(Is Fo)-2(ru)9(r



