

Agenda Item 7

TITLE	2022/23 High Needs Block Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Schools Forum on 12 October 2022
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

This reports forms part of regular reporting to Schools Forum, informing areas of statutory decision making and improving visibility and consultation on wider Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) financial matters.

RECOMMENDATION

Schools Forum is asked to note the update on the HNB and the associated SEND IIP activity.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The report provides Schools Forum with an update on the High Needs Block, SEND Innovation & Improvement Programme and implications for the associated deficit management plan.

1 Background

At the time of budget setting in March 2022, initial projections indicated a £4.4m shortfall on High Needs Block resources for the 2022/23 financial year, with latest figures reporting an increased deficit position at £5.5m, as the number of children and young people in the borough with an EHCP continue to grow.

This report provides an update on the significant programme of work ongoing.

2 2022/23 Financial Position – Key Changes in Forecast

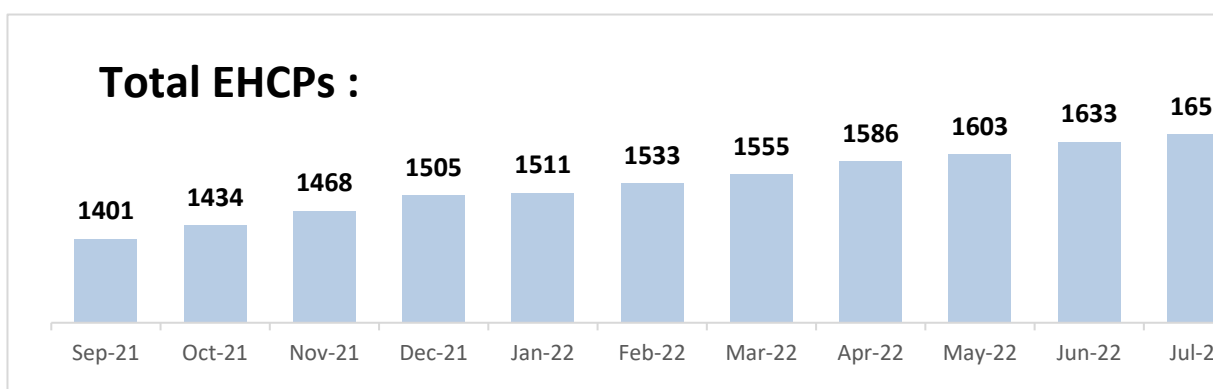
The in-year deficit on the HNB is now forecast at £5.5m, an increase of £1.1m on that previously reported. The increase reflects the continued increase in the number of EHCPs and challenges in sufficiency of local provision.

The HNB forecast takes account of current known EHCP top-ups and phased transfer information as it is currently available for September 2022. The key driver remains an increasing number of EHCPs, and specialist placements out of borough as Wokingham schools are at capacity.

3 Children & Young People with SEND in Wokingham

Levels of demand for support in relation to SEND have increased significantly over the past three years and the number of children and young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in Wokingham has risen significantly in recent years. While the main driver of this relates to the extension of duties brought about by the Children & Families Act 2014, this comes at a time when the local population is also on the increase.

As can be seen below, the number of children & young people in Wokingham with an EHCP has risen by over 19% since September 2021 (a single year rise), with the number above 1,670 (as at Aug 2022). The SEND Service are currently seeing around 30 requests to assess per month, with around 95% of those resulting in an EHCP. On the basis of this trajectory, it is predicted that over the coming years the number of children and young people with EHCPs is likely to increase significantly, as is the proportion of the school population with an EHCP.



Needs have continued to grow in relation to certain types of SEND and SEND-related issues, in particular Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), certain types of

Learning Disability (LD) and needs in relation to Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH). Practitioners also report that complexity of need is also increasing, as an increasing number of children and young people may require multiple types of support relating to several different types of need. Demand for SEND support in mainstream educational settings below the thresholds required for EHCPs has also grown substantially over the past three years, particularly in relation to SEMH.

As noted above EHC requests are expected to continue to grow. Scrutiny of assessment requests continues to be high and currently appropriate highlighting an increase to be reviewed through the Safety Valve work over the next few months.

4 SEND Innovation & Improvement Programme (*Delivery of HNB related activity*)

As reported to Forum previously, the SEND Innovation and Improvement programme is a large, ambitious programme which in its current arrangement runs until December 2022. Continuous improvement work will be continued beyond December 2022 as part of the Safety Valve programme, but it is anticipated that the partnership and governance arrangements will remain in place.

The SEND IIP delivers the goals and aims of the SEND Strategy through Four Working Groups, which mirror the Priorities set out in the SEND Strategy. These Groups are supported by the Coproduction Task and Finish Group. These arrangements are set out in Appendix A.

Key activity and outcomes undertaken via the SEND IIP Working Groups include:

1. More effective demand modelling and forecasting, to ensure the best possible services are in place to help manage demand in coming years
2. More effective activity and financial reporting, as a result of better systems and information management, and closer joint working between the Children's Services Finance Team and SEND professionals
3. More effective joint commissioning with other agencies including Health partners (e.g. in relation to a range of Integrated Therapies for children and young people such as speech and language, physiotherapy, occupational therapy), and taking advantage of efficiencies and economies of scale from commissioning some SEND services in partnership with other agencies and/or neighbouring local areas - where there is a clear value for money benefit to Wokingham residents
4. Several actions relating to a substantial review of the use of the Independent and Non-Maintained Sector, to reduce dependency on out of borough provision and ensure the best possible value for money is delivered through use of independent and non-maintained provision

5. Implementation of the “Ordinarily Available” project in Wokingham, designed to ensure a common standard of SEND support provision is available across Wokingham schools, and that a greater proportion of Wokingham children and young people with SEND needs have their needs met within local, mainstream education
6. A substantial review of Resource Base provision to ensure a viable financial model is in place to deliver the right SEND support locally to help ensure that SEND needs are met as far as possible in-borough and within mainstream education (this work is aligned with the “Ordinarily Available” project summarised above)
7. The focus in the Strategy on building local provision will also help to drive reductions in the costs of Home to School Transport and Travel Assistance associated with transportation of children and young people with SEND out of borough to access appropriate education placements
8. Review of key funding models used by the local authority to ensure sustainable funding models are in place for key SEND services in the coming years – e.g. a review of the Foundry funding Model, to help strengthen outreach provision, provision for post-16 pupils who require ongoing support, provision for re-engagement of children missing from education, and some specialist provision for primary pupils with SEMH and secondary pupils with ASD, and exploration of the development of on-site Alternative Provision for KS4 pupils in vocational and work-related learning
9. Improvements in local special provision – for example in relation to the new DfE- funded Free School at Winnersh Farm for children with Autism which will serve Reading and Wokingham, which will offer an additional 75 places to Wokingham children and young people

A high-level timeline outlining the work of the IIP is provided in Appendix B.

5 SEND Sufficiency Planning

Work on the SEND Sufficiency project has continued and has included very recent visits to schools with resource bases to inform the development of a report and key proposals.

A sufficiency review (completed in 2021) identified that:

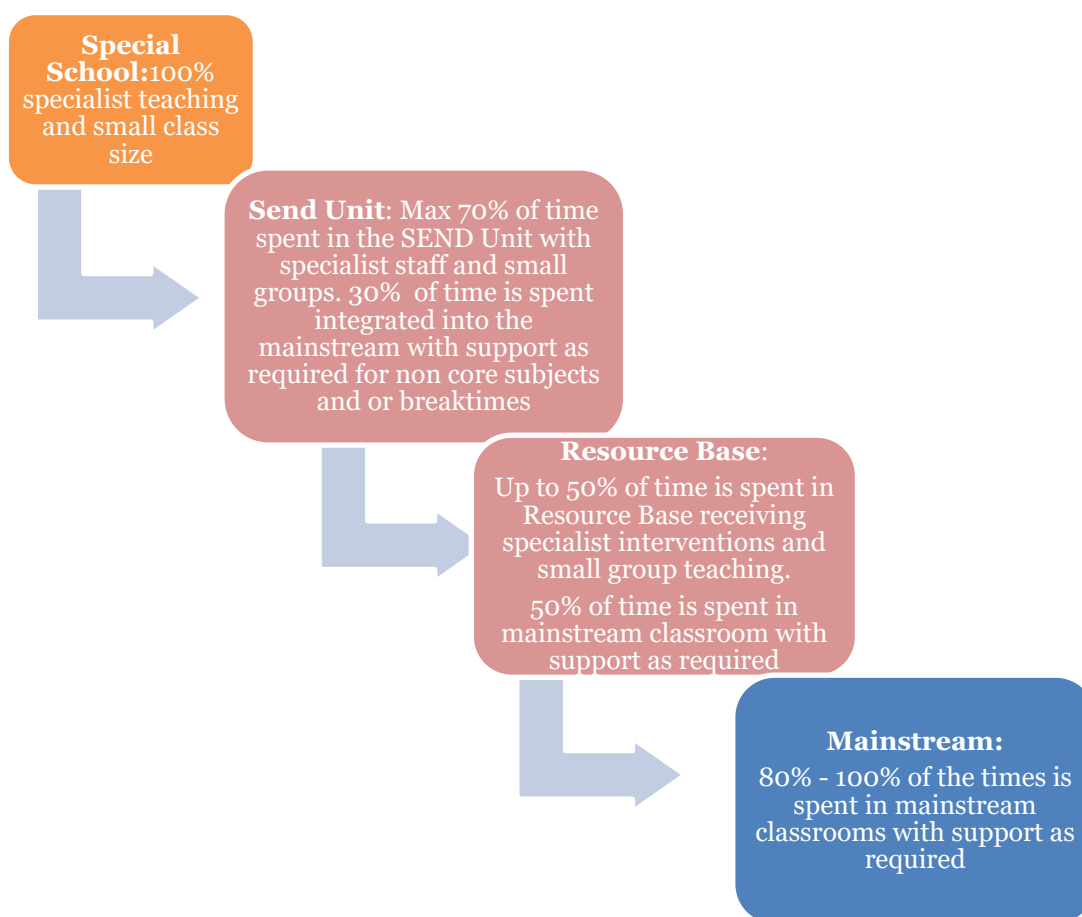
- Due to the significant increase in SEND population seen over the last 3 years there is not enough specialist provision to meet need.
- The number of SEND pupils is projected to continue to grow significantly action needs to be taken to meet the growing demand and ensure that appropriate provision is available locally to meet need and use HNB funding in the most effective way to ensure improved outcomes for CYP with SEND.
- As a result of lack of appropriate provision the LA commissions a disproportionate amount of high cost placements in the independent sector

Key findings of the most recent work (during 2022) have been:

- Places are underutilised in some provision because the needs of children requiring the places is more complex than the existing resource bases were designed for.
- As there has been few detailed service specifications in place, this has caused confusion about what each resource base provides, how it is delivered and managed and this has led to unclear decision making and confusion for families when making choices of schools.
- The LA has had very little strategic involvement in monitoring, shaping and developing the provision in line with the changing need of the SEND population.
- Focus of the SEND Strategy and significant progress is being made in terms of understanding the needs of the SEND population and developing programmes to deliver the specialist provision that is required and responding to the change in demand.
- The operational model of some provision is not in line with the DFE guidance
- The cost of funding empty places at resource base provision which are consistently under number is significant.
- There is a gap in provision for ASD and SEMH pupils in particular with high level of needs, but who would benefit from access to the curriculum for a smaller proportion of time (not specialist provision 100% of the time)
- There is a gap in provision between the resource bases and the special schools in Wokingham with an increasing demand for more complex needs.

A number of proposals based on a continuum of provision (as detailed below), to address the key findings are being finalised, but will look to move from the current model of resource base provision to the continuum of support to better meet demand and needs; explore the creation of new provision (SEND Units), which seek to close the gap between resource bases and special school provision; and implement robust accountability, monitoring and review mechanisms.

Proposals will be presented to Schools Forum at a future meeting. The LA will continue to work with existing schools operating Resource Bases on the development of these proposals.



6. Financial Outlook & Deficit Management Plan

Addressing the challenges on the High Needs Block in the short term is complex, particularly in light of the continuing significant rise in the number of children and young people with an EHCP.

The significant work being taken forward under the governance of the SEND IIP provides a platform for a longer term reduction of out of borough placements, the key to unlocking financial sustainability. Work continues across a range of actions in support of that overall objective.

The LA met with the ESFA on the 6th September to discuss the local financial position, the outline deficit management proposals, and assumptions underpinning longer term financial modelling in advance of formal Safety Valve discussions and this provided an opportunity to discuss modelling assumptions and inform the next stage of that work.

Detailed modelling continues to inform multi-year budget planning as part of the Safety Valve programme and further updates on this will be brought to the next, and subsequent meetings of Schools Forum.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)			
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

Public Sector Equality Duty
Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
Please state clearly what the impact of the decision being made would be on the Council's carbon neutral objective.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

List of Background Papers

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