

Agenda Item: 3

Meeting: Schools Forum
Date: 8th March 2010
Subject: Review of Special Schools Funding Formula
Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children, Families and Learning
Summary: To update the Schools Forum on the review of the Special Schools Funding Formula

Contact Officer: Helen Redding, Borough Hall, Bedford

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

Reason for urgency
(if appropriate)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. To continue with the current arrangements for funding special schools pending the national review of the DSG and Central Bedfordshire's response to this.**

Background

1. At the meeting of the Schools Forum on March 2 2009, it was resolved that the proposed changes to the special school revenue funding formula should be implemented for 2009/10 and reviewed in time to agree any further changes for 2010/11.
2. The review that led to these recommendations focussed on how the budget could be better distributed to target pupil needs, and considered comparisons with other Local Authorities, as well as examining models of funding being implemented by those authorities.
3. It was recognised that Central Bedfordshire had more pupils with lower levels of need in its special schools at that time, but that this profile was changing to one that reflected higher levels of need in all of its special schools.
4. Additionally it was recognised that more pupils were having their needs met locally in Central Bedfordshire schools who previously may have gone to more expensive out of county special schools.

5. Four banding descriptors were agreed that described levels of need and the resources required to meet those needs, and levels were identified for each pupil and were moderated by an external moderator. As an activity led model of funding, the value of each of these bands was calculated by analysing the average cost ratio of teacher to teaching assistant, specifying the class size and teaching assistants as set out in the descriptors, and then calculating the weighted unit per pupil
6. It was agreed to fund the same number of places for the full year based on actual pupils in the schools on the PLASC date, and that no budget would be held in reserve for increases in numbers or changes during the year. Enhancement was agreed for Oak Bank school to reflect the higher levels of need of some of their pupils. This was agreed to be funded from outside of the ISB while a further review was carried out.

Update

7. As new pupils have been admitted to special schools, banding levels 1 – 4 have been agreed at provision panel. If a pupil's needs change within a year, special schools head teachers present a case with evidence to the panel to request a change in banding level to take effect the following year. These changes are reflected in the figures and, as agreed, are based on the numbers on PLASC day
8. As agreed by the Schools Forum in March 2009, the special school head teachers have worked with officers to draft banding descriptors for those pupils who have needs beyond those described in Band 4 and who were currently receiving additional funding agreed by panel paid for from recoupment or statementing budgets. Band 5 descriptors describe those pupils who require additional 1:1 TA support to access the curriculum. There are a very small number of pupils, the majority of whom are at Oak Bank School, who, due to their levels of challenging behaviour, require higher staffing ratios for significant parts of the school day. Special schools have additionally looked at those pupils they feel meet the descriptors for the new Bands 5 and 6, based in most cases on additional money received for specific pupils through other sources agreed at panels.

Finance

9. Indicative budgets issued to schools March 2009, were based on indicative pupil numbers for 2010/11. The indicative pupils numbers at this time were 458, however, the actual pupil numbers as at Jan Plasc 2010 are 447. Although this is a reduction of 11 pupils, the needs are more complex and therefore there is an increase in numbers in the higher banding levels. There are a further 20 pupils in band 4 and to continue with the current model requires an additional £76,048 to be funded from within the ISB.

10. This is the last year of the three year settlement to schools. To fund the new Band 5 and 6 pupils through the ISB, even if current additional centrally retained resources were included in this, the additional costs relating to the higher complexity of need would require funds to be directed away from mainstream to special schools. To fund the differential between the current band of each of the pupils and the allocation of pupils to the proposed bands, would cost £494,004, of which £353,951 has been funded this year for pupils in the schools from centrally retained resources.
11. The national review of the DSG being carried out this year will impact on 11/12 and 12/13 budgets, and will have implications for Central Bedfordshire's distribution to schools. As a consequence, the funding of special schools should be considered as part of the overall review of distribution. It may also be an opportunity to review other factors, for example factors relating to school size and split sites.

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. The enhancements for bands 5 and 6 are not included in the ISB for 10/11
2. The current model of requesting additional funding for individual pupils with higher levels of need through panel demonstrating how the pupils meet the descriptors continue for 2010/2011. There will also be additional moderation of these judgements. This will continue to be funded from the statementing budget for Central Bedfordshire pupils, or through recouplement for out of authority pupils.

Appendices:

Banding Descriptors updated to include Band 5 and 6 descriptors