Report of the Borough Treasurer

Item 7 – High Needs Contingency

Schools Forum

17th September 2014
1. Purpose of the Paper
The current criteria for assessing applications for additional high needs funding have been in place now for one year and it is therefore timely that we should look at their effectiveness in ensuring that resources are allocated appropriately. In addition, the SEND Code of Practice for 0-25 which is due to come into effect in September this year replaces the separate School Action and School Action Plus designations with a single status of SEN; this will render the current contingency criterion in respect of the number of pupils at SA+ obsolete.

2. Background
2.1 On 19 June 2013, the Oldham Schools’ Forum agreed an application process for additional high needs contingency funding. A fund of £289,166 was established, to be distributed to individual schools following a successful application.

2.2 It was agreed that the fund was managed as follows:

- All schools are notified of the existence of the fund
- Schools are notified that decisions regarding any allocations will be based on the following criteria:
  a. School balances less than 3% @31-3-2013. For academies the balance should be the balance reported and verified 31st August 2012.
  b. The school has more than the average for the sector number of Statements.
  c. Number of non statemented pupils e.g. School Action Plus. There will be scrutiny of School Action Plus designations by the authority; i.e. has there been external agency work with the school or pupil.
  d. Comparison of funding allocated to what is needed. Is the school requesting what is deemed good practice?
  e. Amount of Minimum Funding Guarantee received by the school in 2013-14 and amount of notional SEN received.

2.3 Schools who felt they met the criteria should submit a Business Case with evidence of why they met the criteria and how much funding was required, to the Local Authority. In the financial year 2013-14 there were 3 applications made, one of which met the criteria.

2.4 Changes to SEN legislation from September 2014 render the current criteria obsolete; therefore officers have undertaken a review of the 2013 agreed process.

3. Options under consideration
3.1 a. School Balances less than 3% @31-3-2013. For academies the balance should be the balance reported and verified 31st August 2012.

   The fact that a school has a planned balance would not of itself mean that additional funds are needed. The planned balance may be affected by any planned carry forward or in-year deficit, and is not therefore a stand-alone measure.
3.2 b. The school has more than the average for the sector number of Statements.

This criterion is felt to be relevant, as parental preference has legislative protection, which can result in schools having a disproportionate number of pupils with severe and complex needs as the threshold for refusing entry is high.

3.3 c. Number of non statemented pupils e.g. School Action Plus. There will be scrutiny of School Action Plus designations by the authority; i.e. has there been external agency work with the school or pupil.

The Code of practice for SEND: 0-25 replaces the categories of SA and SA+ and with a single status SEN category. All schools are expected to adopt a strategic approach to budget planning in respect of pupils with SEND. This criterion is therefore no longer applicable.

3.4 d. Comparison of funding allocated to what is needed. Is the school requesting what is deemed good practice?

This criterion is met where a school has insufficient notional SEN funds available once statutory support has been allocated for pupils with a statement. It indicates the extent to which a school is taking a strategic approach to using the totality of its available funding for children with additional needs. This factor takes account of the Minimum Funding Guarantee.

4. Review of Funding

The School Finance Team have reviewed all schools notional SEN budgets to ensure it is sufficient to meet the first £6,000 of the cost of additional support for each high needs pupil on roll.

Apart from one school with a shortfall in funding of £160 all schools had sufficient notional SEN funding to meet the first £6,000.

5. Actions/ Recommendations

School Forum members are asked to approve the following

- Criterion C should be removed from the assessment process, as there is now a single SEN status.

- A 2-stage process should be introduced, using the current Criteria D and E. Criteria D and E will be based on the current year. If the school does not have sufficient funds allocated to allow them to meet the statutory requirement, then the other criteria should be used to assess the additional amount the school requires.

- Any school that is eligible at the 1st stage would then be assessed against the current criteria A and B. (Balances based on previous financial/academic year)

- Note the review of schools notional SEN budgets.