



## NORTH YORKSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

<b>Date of meeting:</b>	Thursday, 20 January, 2022
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Review of High Needs Sub-Group Arrangements</b>
<b>Type of report:</b> Delete as required	For discussion only
<b>Executive summary:</b> Including reason for submission	The report discusses the responses received to a recent review of the operation of the High Needs Sub-Group and proposes some changes to the future operation of the group.
<b>Budget / Risk implications:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Recommendations:</b>	
<b>Voting requirements:</b>	None
<b>Appendices:</b> To be attached	Appendix 1 :- High Needs Funding Sub-Group Questionnaire – Summary of Responses
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<b>Presenting officer:</b> If not the originator	

**(Review of High Needs Sub-Group Arrangements)****1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 An exercise has recently been undertaken to seek views in relation to the operation of the High Needs Sub-Group from both members of the Sub-Group and from the Schools Forum membership. This was undertaken to enable us to review the basis of the group's operation (including the fundamental challenge of whether the group was required), with a view to strengthening the effectiveness of the group and its contribution to Schools Forum decision-making.
- 1.2 This report presents a set of recommendations flowing from detailed consideration of the feedback from the survey.

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 It was considered appropriate to review the ongoing requirement for the High Needs Sub-Group and whether we should make any changes to its remit / membership / scope of meetings etc. This was initially considered because the group has been operating since 2018 (when it was founded to provide a forum to assess and evaluate some significant policy proposals at that stage). However, we are also conscious that over the last eighteen months, attendance at the group has declined - and whilst that could partially be attributed to the implications of the pandemic, we wanted to assess if there were any other substantive issues to evaluate.
- 2.2. The vehicle selected for ascertaining the views of colleagues was a relatively light touch survey, which was circulated to all members of the Schools Forum and the High Needs Sub-Group. We received nine responses (2 from members of the sub-group and 7 from wider membership of the Schools Forum). The headline responses to the questions is attached as appendix 1 - and most respondents provided additional comments that have been interpreted for the purposes of this report.

**3.0 DISCUSSION**

- 3.1. The most fundamental question we felt needed to be addressed from the review was the merit in continuing with the operation of the group. From a local authority perspective, we find the opportunity to discuss high needs policy options and the overall context of the high needs budget challenge in greater depth with a smaller group has significant benefits – but we are also very conscious of the demands on the time of our school leaders and particularly Schools Forum representatives, hence our desire to assess this issue. The response to the questionnaire was that colleagues were generally in favour of continuing with the group, although it is acknowledged that this was not a universal view. One colleague felt that the group should not continue (although no specific reasons were provided) whilst other comments referenced the time commitment and frequency of meetings and the inter-relationship with conduct of business at the main Forum meetings.
- 3.2. On balance, our view is that there is **merit in continuing with the group** (particularly as the issue of the frequency of meetings is addressed below). It is worth noting that one colleague appropriately highlighted that all of this discussion is predicated on the Schools Forum continuing with a similar remit / set of responsibilities as prescribed in existing Government school funding policy.

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- 3.3. In terms of the **frequency of meetings**, the arrangements over the course of the last three years have been that the group generally meets on a half-termly basis. The consensus from the survey responses was to reduce that frequency, with five of the nine responses favouring a termly scheduling of meetings, and two further responses favouring the approach of an annual meeting supported by the use of ad hoc meetings when significant policy proposals were ready for discussion. Having assessed this issue, colleagues within the local authority feel that on balance, the move to a termly structure of meetings could work effectively, and it is proposed that this approach is adopted through to Spring 2023.
- 3.4. In terms of the **business** that can most effectively be progressed through discussion/evaluation with the High Needs Sub-Group, there is a desire on the part of local authority officers to use the sessions to progress reviews of challenging areas of policy/budget decision-making (with all discussions taking place in the context of the ongoing challenges of ensuring that North Yorkshire lives within its relatively constrained High Needs DSG allocation). However, the survey itself generated relatively little in terms of responses to areas that members of the Sub-Group / Schools Forum considered merited specific consideration – apart from one suggestion regarding “SEMH Provision – fair distribution of Specialist Provision”, and a concern that there should be a greater focus on Early Years policy / investment levels. It is proposed that a significant agenda item for the Spring Term 2022 meeting (scheduled for 10<sup>th</sup> February 2022) will be the co-designing of a work programme for the calendar year 2022.
- 3.5. In terms of **membership of the Group**, there was constructive feedback around seeking a stronger representation from the primary sector. In addition, all nine respondents considered that it would be positive to invite the locality board chairs (or their representatives) to attend the High Needs Sub-Group. In relation to the first issue, we are proposing to introduce nominated substitutes for all representatives – particularly in line of the proposal to reduce the frequency of meetings to termly. In relation to the issue of attendance of Locality Board Chairs, the local authority would see real benefits in further developing the strategic cohesion between the Locality Boards and Schools Forum. However, we are very mindful of increasing the required commitment of Locality Board Chairs, and consequently would progress along the lines suggested that either Locality Board Chairs or a nominated representative would be invited to the Sub-Group meetings from each Board.

**4.0. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1. Schools Forum colleagues are invited to comment upon the proposals contained in this paper – specifically that:-
- The High Needs Sub-Group should continue to function, but in future will meet on a termly basis.
  - That the membership of the group will be strengthened through the involvement of Locality Board Chairs (or their nominated representative) and the use of nominated substitutes (as appropriate).

STUART CARLTON  
Corporate Director – Children and Young People’s Service

**Appendix 1:- High Needs Funding Sub-Group Questionnaire: - Summary of Responses**

**Do you see merit in continuing to operate a High Needs Sub-Group (with the view that proposals relating to the High Needs budget can be scrutinised in greater depth by colleagues with a close working understanding of the subject area?)**

Eight responses received, two yes responses, five yes but with some modification and one response of No.

**If you feel that the group should continue to meet, what do you feel should be the frequency of meetings? :-**

	No. of Votes	% of Votes
Termly	5	56%
Annual Review meeting and ad hoc meetings where policy proposals are in the pipeline	2	22%
Ad-hoc meetings to consider individual policy proposals or major Government initiatives	1	11%
Other	1	11%

**Assuming the group is to continue, what do you feel should be the prime areas of business of the Sub Group?**

	No. of Votes	% of Votes
Specific Policy Change / Funding Change / Efficiency Proposals	6	67%
Updates on overall scale of challenge on the high needs budget – linked to DfE policy position	2	22%
Any other opportunities	1	11%

**Specifically are there any areas of expenditure/policy within the high needs budget area that you feel should be a priority for review during next year (if the group is to continue) as we would want to ensure that the agendas do reflect our collective priorities ?**

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Seven responses received. Two responses indicated no specific areas identified, whilst one response discussed the ongoing need to identify creative approaches to address the High Needs deficit. Two responses discussed reviewing the proportion of funding available to assist early years with children with high needs. One response discussed the fair distribution of Specialist Provision – particularly in relation to SEMH, and one response discussed reviewing funding bands because there of a perception of significant gaps between need and funding allocated

**The terms of reference of the group are attached as Appendix 1. Are there any changes, or areas you feel would merit from review, in the terms of reference?**

Five responses received – four of which were no changes. The only specific comment was about harnessing and recognising Locality Boards and their role as part of the service delivery mechanism.

**Do you have any feedback on the current membership of the group?**

Five responses received – one of which was no feedback. One response identified the potential to involve Locality Boards, one response stressed the importance of connectivity with the Schools Forum, and one response specifically sought to develop a substitute arrangement to ensure Primary school leaders were represented in discussions. Finally, one response indicated it was difficult to comment because of the poor attendance at recent meetings.

**Are you supportive of the proposal to add locality board Chairs (or their representatives) to the membership of the group?**

	No. of Votes	% of Votes
Yes	9	100
No	0	0