

Item 13

Recommendations of the High Needs Block Working Group

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Brief Summary

On 29 September 26, the High Needs Block Working Group considered several reports, including:

- 1. Matters Arising**
- 2. LCC SEND Reform Plan**
- 3. Dedicated Schools Block Monitoring 2026/27**
- 4. High Needs Block Mitigation Report 2026/27**
- 5. Clawback Exemption Request 2026/27**
- 6. Any Other Business**

A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided in this report.

Recommendations

The Forum is asked to:

- Note the report from the High Needs Block Working Group held on 29 September 2026.
- Ratify the Working Group's recommendations.

On 29 September 26, the High Needs Working Group considered several reports. A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided below:

1. Matters Arising

The Local Authority reported that indicative place letters for special schools have not yet been issued due to outstanding data.

The working group:
Noted the update.

Discussed:

- **Officers advised that Special schools have been contacted and several school returns remain outstanding despite the submission deadline having passed, follow up activity is ongoing.**



- It was noted that the information is required to support planning for current placements and anticipated growth in special school provision.
- Members suggested that direct telephone discussions, which had been used successfully in previous years, may assist in resolving outstanding queries and securing the remaining returns.

2. LCC SEND Reform Plan

The Local Authority provided an update on the SEND Reform plan submission, advising that approval from the Department for Education is still awaited. Approval had been anticipated the previous week but has not yet been received. It was noted that some local authorities have been informed that their submissions were not approved, however, no such communication has been received for Lancashire. Officers advised that feedback and a decision is expected imminently which will be feedback to members.

**The working group:
Noted the update.**

3. Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring 2026/27

As noted under item 11.

**The working group:
Noted the report.**

Discussed:

- The forecast overspend reflects increased demand and the impact of the EHCP backlog, which has now significantly reduced. Work is underway to improve demand forecasting and future budget projections.
- Members queried the effectiveness of mitigation measures as demand and costs continue to rise. The Local Authority advised that demand is increasing nationally, with many children awaiting specialist placements.
- Delays to local provision expansion projects are increasing reliance on independent placements.
- Members requested an updated breakdown of independent and local placement costs.
- Officers advised that a new provider framework is being developed to strengthen oversight and support value for money.

4. High Needs Block Mitigations 2026/27

Members received an update on progress against the High Needs Block mitigation programme. Significant progress has been made across inclusion, outreach and specialist teaching initiatives, with most allocated funding now committed or spent. Ongoing activity is focused on strengthening inclusive practice, supporting school transitions, expanding specialist support, and identifying opportunities to improve long-term financial sustainability and reduce future cost pressures.

**The working group:
Noted the report.**

Discussed:



- Officers reported progress across SEMH outreach and specialist teaching services, with key posts filled, support is now in place, and a reduction in permanent exclusions contributing to cost savings.
- The sensory support service is operational, with annual reviews underway and ongoing work to increase school engagement and access to support.
- The Associate Specialist Teaching Service and transition support programme continue to strengthen early SEND support, with transition support offered to most schools for Reception and Year 7 pupils.
- Members noted plans to replace Inclusion Hubs through Experts at hand, with a new district-led SEND support model from 2027.
- Members welcomed positive feedback on outreach provision and noted that discussions with providers are ongoing to shape future delivery.
- It was noted that this report will now only be presented to the HNBWG.

5. Clawback Exemption Request 2026/27

A special school has requested a 2026/27 clawback exemption for approximately £212,000 of income generated through its post-19 health and social care provision.

The working group:

Members supported this request and recommended approval at Schools Forum.

6. Any Other Business

There were two items of any other business to note from officers.

6.1 Members received an update on proposals to replace the current Inclusion Hub model with a centrally managed, district led SEND Cluster approach funding mainly through Experts at Hand initiative. The proposed model aims to build on existing Inclusion Hub successes while providing a sustainable and equitable system of support across all age phases. Resources will be managed centrally and aligned to local district needs.

Discussed:

- **Members requested clear communication on future funding arrangements.**
- **Officers outlined next steps for engagement and implementation.**
- **Officers confirmed this item will be presented at the Schools Forum.**

a) Members received an update on recent DfE and LCC consultations:

- DfE Early Years Funding Consultation – LA in agreement
- DfE Upfront Funding for Mainstream SEND Consultation
- LCC Schools Funding Formula Consultation
- LCC Early Years Funding Consultation

Discussed:

- **Concerns were raised regarding eligibility and voting arrangements within the Early Years consultation.**
- **Colleagues were reminded that results of the LCC consultations will be presented at the October Schools Forum where members will formally vote.**

