
Dudley Schools Forum - 21st June 2022

Report of the Director of Childrens Services

Education Skills and Funding Agency Management Plan Update

Purpose

1. To provide Schools Forum with update on Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's (the Local Authority) activities and progress at a strategic level towards achieving the outcomes of the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) Management Plan/Financial Recovery Plan.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that the Schools Forum note the progress achieved and the revised approaches, including the baselined position of the forecast and the approach of aligning improvement activity to the financial recovery of the High Needs Block of the DSG.

Background

3. In July 2021, the Department for Education and the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) published a guidance document for local authorities entitled '*Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan Template*'.

The guidance provides a tool that has been designed and built by the ESFA to support local authorities to bring together key information to support and formulate their DSG financial planning and recovery.

The Management Plan is designed as a tool to help authorities align key improvement activity to help understanding financial recovery impact as well as to support and provide guidance on key areas of consideration.

At the Schools Forum meeting of 1st March 2022, the Local Authority presented the draft approach for using the ESFA Management Plan Template to support and guide the finance recovery plan.

The Plan includes data as well as contextual information around what is being done to support the financial recovery activity. This includes, but is not limited to:

- EHCP Data current and forecasting through to 2026/27

- Financial data current and forecast through to 2026/27
- Activity being undertaken to address/mitigate financial pressures
- Comparator information across neighbours and nationally

Apart from the data around finance and number of children with SEND it provides a framework to consider areas of work around:

- Local area and governance
- Improvement workstream activity
- Stakeholders and engagement
- Placements and commissioning
- Local authorities' specific plans for improvements operationally

Further work has been undertaken to ensure that the ESFA Management Plan and wider SEND Improvement programme align their activities to ensure that improvement activities across the services are conscious of the impact on finance, as well as to make sure that the Local Authority has a full system approach to the ESFA Management Plan rather than purely a financial recovery approach.

Progress Update

4. Following the feedback from the Written Statement of Action, Self-Evaluation exercise and wider SEND Improvement Programme work the Local Authority has taken the opportunity to ensure a single, aligned and clear improvement programme across 0-25 Education for Dudley that supports activity to deliver improvements through the ESFA Management Plan.

Whilst undertaking the development work we have also been able to use the full year finance data and greater availability of robust data to revisit the forecast and as such the ESFA Management Plan provides the mechanism to monitor the impact and position on the budgets/finance no matter what the impact, be it through increased funding, savings, efficiencies, improved performance, with the strategic focus being *“Have we changed the forecast from where we are now?”*.

Governance schedules are now in place with the Budget Working Group being regularly updated and the Schools Forum to be updated mid-year and following year end as previously agreed.

Attached as Appendix 1 is the Executive Summary from the ESFA Management Plan. The full plan will be published on the local offer by the end of the summer term.

Finance

5. From 1st April 2006, the Schools Budget has been funded by a direct grant; Dedicated School Grant (DSG).



Law

6. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (the Local Authority) has a statutory duty to consult with and, on certain matters, obtain the approval of the Schools Forum with regards funding for schools and other educational provision. As the Management Plan Template produced by the ESFA, provides a tool for collating and presenting that information, its use enables the Local Authority to comply with this duty by supplying the Schools Forum with clear, accurate and up to date financial information.

Risk Management

7. The ESFA Management Plan is a tool to provide assurance that improvement activity being undertaken support financial recovery. The Plan does not in itself undertake any direct management of activity, instead it helps to challenge and assure, as such it is a tool to support the improvement programme and mitigate risks identified for the service area.

Equality Impact

8. The Equality Act 2010 requires that bodies treat individuals and groups that satisfy one or more '*protected characteristic*', e.g. gender, race, disability, etc., fairly. Therefore, because children and young people with SEND are likely to be deemed disabled under the Act, by working to ensure that local SEND services meet the needs of such children and young people, the Local Authority is continuing to comply with the legal duties imposed by this legislation.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

9. This report has no direct implications for Human Resources or Organisational Development.

Commercial/Procurement

10. There are no procurement implications as the tool has been provided free of charge

Council Priorities and Projects

11. There is no direct impact on Council Priorities from the Management Plan, however, it does provide assurance and progress tracking of improvement activity for children and young people with SEND across Dudley.

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Appendix 1 – ESFA Management Plan Executive Summary



Dudley ESFA
Management Plan_2