**SCHOOLS FORUM – 25TH JUNE 2014**

**SEN WORKING PARTY UPDATE**

1. **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to advise Schools Forum Members as to progress following concerns raised at the last meeting in respect of the banding criteria.

1. **Background**

At the last meeting of the Schools Forum on the 19th March 2014 a matter was raised in respect of changes to the banding criteria and the potential impact that this could have on the financial stability of the Special Schools. Schools Forum passed a resolution that a meeting be held between the SEN Working Party and appropriate officers from the Authority to discuss this matter.

Since the Schools Forum meeting a number of discussions and meetings have been held to discuss this and other issues that were raised subsequent to the Schools Forum meeting.

1. **Overview and Summary of discussions**

The SEN Working Party at its meeting on the 18th June 2014 discussed the following:

* The agreed financial model on the 10th December 2013
* The SEN Banding descriptors.
* The allocation of bandings to pupils
* Potential financial implications arising for Special School

The history of how we had got to where we were was discussed as a reminder with a focus around the financial model agreed and the sequence of events with regards to the banding criteria. This latter matter was the main focus of the debate particularly around the process of banding allocation and consultation about the revision to the banding criteria.

The potential financial implications were detailed and discussed particularly around payment protections in 2013-14 (academic year), the results of the financial model presented to forum (to take effect for Special Schools in the academic year 2014-15), the workings of the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) as they applied to Special Schools and the impact this could have.

Having regard to the financial affordability of the High Needs Block and to provide certainty of funding in what is not only a relatively new funding stream but embedding a refining of banding criteria definitions, and remaining committed to the financial model previously agreed officers have determined to provide the MFG protection on the values calculated as per the model agreed by the Schools Forum.

This decision is affordable and results in an outcome where In respect of “top up” CPA and HPA will receive a minimum increase of £93k and £31k respectively over their 2013-14 protected “top up” payment.

1. **SEN Working Party recommendations**

Following a discussion of the above the SEN Working Party recommends that:

* No changes to the financial model values as approved on the 10th December 2013.
* Review the descriptors by the end of the summer term 2014. The SEN Working Party (extended to include appropriate representation and professionals) will undertake the review.
* Dependent on the outcome of the above, if requested review the banding decisions that were based on the final descriptors (post February 2014).
* Use the model approved by the Schools Forum on the 10th December 2013 as the baseline for MFG protection. The will use the model value for the school as the baseline rather than the payments made in 2013-14.
* Revert to MFG methodology and calculation in 2015/16 as set out in national guidance.
* The extended SEN Working Party will review Special School Place Planning to inform future commissioning of places and report any financial implications to the forum. Work to commence in the Autumn term 2014.
* The independent review of SEN process should be shared with the SEN strategy group for their determination as to the way forward. Any financial implications will be reported to the Schools Forum.

1. **Recommendation**

It is recommended:

1. That members approve the recommendations of the SEN Working Party.
2. That any material financial matters arising from the review of the descriptors or Place Planning work be referred back to Schools Forum

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