



West Northants Schools forum: 2 July 2024
Agenda Item 8
High Needs Funding Project Update

Related Agenda items:

none

Appendices

Appendix A – WNC SEND Funding Recommendations Consultation Final

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) is required to consult with Schools Forum on the recommended changes to SEND Funding for children and young people (CYP) with and without EHC Plans.
- 1.2. Recommended changes to Targeted SEND Funding were presented to and approved by Forum members on 14 February 2024 (also referred to as SEN inclusion funding or SENIF, in the early years sector). An increase of 25% in the hourly rate was approved and implemented from 1 April 2024 across the early years sector.
- 1.3. The recommended increased investment of £2.8m plus changes to Targeted SEND Funding for school age children (Non-statutory) and EHC Plan Funding for CYP within early years settings, mainstream schools and units within mainstream schools were presented to Forum in February 2024. Forum support was secured.
- 1.4. In line with statutory duties, WNC must also ensure that any changes to SEND provision and high needs funding arrangements are made in close consultation and co-production with the schools, early years providers affected, as well as parents of CYP with SEND and young people themselves. The recommended changes to the funding methodologies and the funding levels meant that this consultation step is required.
- 1.5. The SEND Funding Recommendation Consultation took place from 30 April to 2 June and the results plus the final WNC SEND funding recommendations, are detailed in this report.

1.6. In addition, within this report WNC will respond to the issues and questions raised by Forum members at the February meeting to the original recommendations.

1.7. For consistency, this report has been based on the format used to present the outcomes of the Early years funding consultation to the Forum members in February 2024.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 WNC commissioned a public consultation in September 2023 regarding SEND Funding Principles. The outcome of the consultation was positive, and results were presented to Schools Forum in October. In summary, the results provided a strong endorsement that funding should be based on the level of need, the higher the level of need means the higher the level of funding, the system of funding allocation should be consistent and WNC should continue to support CYP with special education needs but without an EHC Plan (Non-statutory).

2.2 WNC is also required to consult on the recommended funding for CYP with and without EHC Plans if methodology for calculating funding or levels of funding change. This consultation must include education providers plus the parent / carers of CYP with SEND and young people themselves.

2.3 As part of this second consultation process, a public consultation took place from 30 April to 2 June 2024. This consultation was promoted via the WNC Local Offer and corporate communication channels, the WNC residents panel, early years sector communication channels, mainstream schools communication channels plus West Northants Voices in Partnership (WNVP) communication channels.

2.4 The outcome of all quantitative questions from the specific respondent group were positive in the majority and therefore WNC plan to implement the finalised funding recommendations from 1 September 2024. This will ensure that education providers can access the additional £2.8m allocated to the funding initiatives via the implementation of fair, equitable, consistent and transparent funding methodologies.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Schools Forum:

- a) Support the results of the SEND Funding Recommendations Consultation
- b) Support the finalised funding recommendations from WNC and their implementation from 1 September 2024

4. Reason for Recommendations

- *These recommendations have been co-produced with representatives from parent / carer forum plus representatives from early years settings, mainstream schools and units at mainstream schools via the SEND Funding Project Team. This initiative started in September 2022.*

- *These recommendations align with the WNC statutory requirements to consult with parent / carers of CYP with SEND, young people with SEND and education providers if changes are made to SEND funding.*
- *These recommendations support West Northamptonshire Council's ambition to transform SEND funding and introduce a system of funding which is based on the level of need and is fair, equitable, consistent and transparent.*
- *These recommendations support schools manage the change to a new funding system for top up funding.*

5. Report Background

- 5.1 SEND Funding recommendations were presented to Schools Forum on 14 February 2024. Support was secured from Forum members and the agreement was that WNC would commission a consultation for March and April, before presenting the results to Schools Forum at the May meeting.
- 5.2 On 8 March, an Area Inspection (Ofsted and Care Quality Commission) was announced for WNC and as a result, the consultation was delayed due to WNC resources, supporting the inspectors. Consequently, the May Schools Forum meeting was cancelled.
- 5.3 This report includes the feedback from recent consultation and WNC feedback to the questions raised by Forum members at the February meetings.
- 5.4 The funding recommendations for EHC Plans for early years, mainstream schools and units at mainstream schools are in table 1 and for Targeted SEND Funding in mainstream schools are in table 2.

Table 1: WNC recommended funding levels for EHC Plans for early years, mainstream schools, and units at mainstream schools

Band Level	Top Up Funding
1	£0
2	£4,420
3	£4,951
4	£5,429
5	£5,981
6	£9,464
7	£12,542
8	£16,152
9	£20,081
10	£23,904

Table 2 : WNC recommended funding levels for Targeted SEND Funding for mainstream schools (non-statutory)

SEND Range	TSF Funding
1	£0
2	£0
3	£0
4a	Up to £4,000
4b	Up to £6,000
5	Up to £8,000
6*	Up to £8,000
7*	Up to £8,000

*Forum members are asked to note the change from the February paper. A funding level of up to £8,000 has been added to SEND Ranges 6 and 7 for CYP who do not have an EHC Plan, but do have high level needs, and are at a mainstream school, but not in a unit at their mainstream school. It is anticipated that this is very low number of CYP.

6. Issues and Choices

- 6.1 EHC Plan funding: implementation of the education banding tool in early years settings, mainstream schools and units at mainstream schools from 1 September at the funding levels highlighted in section 5.4.
- 6.2 Payment protection original recommendation: the original levels at total school level (taking into consideration the move from EHCP funding to Education Banding Tool funding and the ceasing of any special arrangements that do not meet the exceptions criteria) were 75% for year 1, 50% in year 2 and 25% in year 3. Please note the payment protection periods are aligned with WNC financial years from April to March; 2024-25, 2025-26 and 2026-27 and the first year of protection is for 7 months from September 2024 to March 2025.
- 6.3 Payment protection change rationale: WNC recognises that the delay in the implementation of the new EHC Plan funding levels now means that this takes place 5 months into the April 2024 / March 2025 financial year. This has resulted in uncertainty within the mainstream schools and units which will lose funding due to the implementation of the education banding tools based on the level of needs of CYP. A revised proposal is therefore needed to address this.
- 6.4 Payment protection revised recommendations:
For the period September 2024 to March 2025 the payment protection will be increased to **100%**, which means that no education providers will lose funding for the balance of the current financial year September 2024 to March 2025 as compared to funding

received in April to August of 2024. Payment protection levels for 2025-26 and 2026-27 will remain at 50% and 25% respectively. These will however be reviewed annually as part of the budget review process detailed in section 10.

- 6.5 Targeted SEND Funding budget pressure: the rate of applications for funding from schools is higher than estimated during the financial modelling in September 2023. Approved applications are therefore expected to consume the additional £0.3m allocated for funding for SEND Ranges 4a, 4b and 5 (support is also needed for a small number of SEND Range applications 6 & 7).
- 6.6 Targeted SEND Funding for school age CYP (non-statutory): implementation of funding aligned to the SEND Ranges in mainstream schools from 1 September at the funding levels highlighted in section 5.4. This will be limited to SEND Ranges 4a to 7.
- 6.7 Targeted SEND Funding for SEND Range 3: WNC cannot currently expand the support for range 3 at this time due to budget restrictions. The revised recommendation is however, to monitor the applications that are received for the first few months of the academic year and update Forum members at the appropriate meeting regarding potential support from April 2025. This combination of data (based on applications) and budget monitoring will allow WNC to make an informed decision about future support for SEND Range 3.
- 6.8 Targeted SEND Funding duration: WNC cannot currently extend the duration of support from 2 years due to budget restrictions. Forum members are however asked to note that longer support could be considered in exceptional cases in line with the Targeted SEND Funding exceptions already published. This will also be monitored during the remainder of the financial year and Forum members will be updated at a future appropriate meeting.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 WNC have allocated an additional £2.8m to support the SEND Funding recommendations. This equates to £2.2m additional EHC Plan funding in mainstream schools, an additional £0.2m support for EHC Plans in units at mainstream schools, £0.3m for payment protection and £0.3m additional support for Targeted SEND Funding for school age CYP (non-statutory).
- 7.1.2 Implementation of these recommendations will also ensure that the education providers (early years settings, mainstream schools and units at mainstream schools) have access to the additional funding at the start of the 2024-25 academic year.
- 7.1.3 The budget position will be monitored through the year to ensure action is taken as soon as possible to mitigate any forecast overspends should they arise.

7.2 **Legal**

7.2.1 There are no known legal implications arising from the funding recommendations.

7.3 **Risk**

7.3.1 There are no **new** significant risks arising from the WNC SEND Funding recommendations in this report.

7.3.2 Implementation of the funding recommendations from 1 September will ensure that the vast majority of schools will be able to access increased funding with immediate effect.

7.3.3 For the education providers which will receive reduced funding, the payment protection will also start with immediate effect and this will offset reduction in the first year of implementation from September 2024 to March 2025.

7.3.4 A list of exceptions have already been published for both EHC Plan funding and Targeted SEND Funding within the February 2024 Schools Forum paper. These will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are up to date. These exceptions ensure that there is access to funding available in the event of circumstances which have not been considered during the financial modelling and consultation processes.

8. SEND Funding Recommendations Consultation

8.1.1 This consultation describes WNC's SEND Funding Recommendations Consultation which took place from 30 April to 2 June.

8.1.2 We received 139 responses in total to the consultation. This was a reduction of 46% from the SEND Funding Principles Consultation in September 2023. Of these, there was a significant increase in engagement from education providers of +40%. Engagement of parents / carers of CYP with SEND and young people with send was reduced by 60% and 67% respectively.

8.1.3 For the purposes of this report, the feedback from respondents who do not meet the criteria of the required groups are not included ie only parents / carers of CYP with SEND, young people with SEND and education providers (early years and mainstream schools / units)

8.2 Promotion for both consultations used the same communication channels: the WNC Local Offer and corporate communication channels, the WNC residents panel, early years sector communication channels, mainstream schools communication channels plus West Northants Voices in Partnership (WNVP) communication channels.

- 8.2.1 The methodology for the inclusion of results was consistent across both consultations. This was discussed and aligned with Forum members at the time of the presentation of the first consultation in October.
- 8.2.2 Feedback from all relevant respondents was included. This included those completed and then submitted the consultation (47%) and those that completed it, but did not submit their responses (53%).
- 8.2.3 Responses from all relevant respondents (complete and incomplete) were treated equally (parents, carers of CYP with SEND, young people with SEND, education providers; early years and mainstream schools and units).
- 8.2.4 Only answers from respondents who “expressed a preference” are included in the results. Agree and strongly agree responses are combined and considered as a positive response to the question. “disagree” and “strongly disagree” responses are combined and are considered to be a negative response to the question.
- 8.2.5 The overall feedback is that the relevant respondents support the WNC SEND Funding recommendations as the answers to all 5 questions were positive (agree / strongly agree).
- 8.2.6 Below outlines the Consultation outcomes to the quantitative questions: -
- 8.2.7 Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to expand the Educational Banding Tool to include early years, mainstream schools and SEND units at mainstream schools?

	Overall Total		
Options	#	%	%
Strongly Agree	20	28%	72%
Agree	31	44%	
Disagree	11	15%	28%
Strongly Disagree	9	13%	
Total	71	100%	100%

- 8.2.8 Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following funding rate proposals for children and young people with an EHC plan in Early Years settings, Mainstream Schools and Resource Units at Mainstream?

	Overall Total		
Options	#	%	%
Strongly Agree	9	16%	55%
Agree	23	40%	
Disagree	6	10%	45%
Strongly Disagree	20	34%	
Total	58	100%	100%

8.2.9 Q3. The introduction of the Educational Banding Tool will mean that the majority of educational settings will receive an increased level of funding. Some educational settings may however see a reduction in their funding level. In settings where funding level is reduced, we want to introduce a funding protection until the end of the special arrangement period. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our approach?

	Overall Total		
Options	#	%	%
Strongly Agree	16	24%	67%
Agree	28	42%	
Disagree	5	8%	33%
Strongly Disagree	17	26%	
Total	66	100%	100%

8.2.10 Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed funding rates for Targeted SEND Funding for CYP in Mainstream Schools? - proposed funding rates for Targeted SEND Funding for CYP in Mainstream Schools?

	Overall Total		
Options	#	%	%
Strongly Agree	11	19%	59%
Agree	23	40%	
Disagree	11	19%	41%
Strongly Disagree	13	22%	
Total	58	100%	100%

8.2.11 Q5. *Our view and also the view of the Schools Forum is that it is important that one of the conditions of additional funding investment will require educational settings to implement the WNC's SEND Ranges. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our view?*

	Overall Total		
<u>Options</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Strongly Agree	11	21%	77%
Agree	29	56%	
Disagree	3	6%	23%
Strongly Disagree	9	17%	
Total	52	100%	100%

- 8.3 In addition to the 5 questions on the planned funding changes, respondents were also invited to answer an additional more open question. *Q: Notwithstanding your views about the sufficiency of funding, please describe any other aspects of the financial and funding arrangements that you think could be amended to improve the delivery of provision for young people with SEND: - Further comments.*
- 8.4 59 responses were received, and these were then collated into 4 Level #1 funding topics. They were then further collated into 25 Level #2 categories. Forum members are asked to note that the detailed responses cannot be shared more widely, as this consultation was anonymous but some personal identification details were shared by respondents which could mean that they could be identified. The report author will therefore integrate the generic questions into the FAQ documents which are being prepared to support the project.
- 8.5 This table provides a summary of the broad categories of questions and comments that were provided by respondents to the qualitative question in the consultation (Level #1)

<u>Level #1</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
EHC Plans	41	69%
Targeted SEND Funding	7	12%
Generic SEND Funding	8	14%
SEND Funding Consultation	3	5%
Total	59	100%

- 8.6 This table provides more details of the categories of questions and comments that were provided by respondents to the qualitative question in the consultation (Level #2)

#	Level #1	Level #2	#	%	Top 5
1	EHC Plans	RAS Banding Levels	18	31%	58%
2	EHC Plans	Special Arrangements	6	10%	
3	EHC Plans	Change Management	4	7%	
4	EHC Plans	Quality of EHC Plans	3	5%	
5	Generic SEND Funding	High Needs Funding Budget	3	5%	
6	SEND Funding Consultation	SEND Funding Consultation	3	5%	
7	EHC Plans	Cost & inflation increases	2	3%	
8	Targeted SEND Funding	Funding Levels	2	3%	
9	Targeted Send Funding	SEND Ranges 1 to 3	2	3%	
10	EHC Plans	Assessment delays	1	2%	
11	EHC Plans	Child Specific Issues	1	2%	
12	EHC Plans	Independent Schools	1	2%	
13	EHC Plans	SEND Capacity	1	2%	
14	EHC Plans	SEND Range alignment	1	2%	
15	EHC Plans	Assessment period funding	1	2%	
16	EHC Plans	High Needs Funding Budget	1	2%	
17	EHC Plans	Best practice in schools	1	2%	
18	Generic SEND Funding	SEND Children school Day	1	2%	
19	Generic SEND Funding	SEND Funding for Wrap Around Support	1	2%	
20	Generic SEND Funding	Early intervention	1	2%	
21	Generic SEND Funding	Budget monitoring	1	2%	
22	Generic SEND Funding	Child Specific Issues	1	2%	
23	Targeted SEND Funding	Funding Continuation	1	2%	
24	Targeted SEND Funding	Consistency of funding	1	2%	
25	Targeted SEND Funding	Time limited Funding	1	2%	
		Total	59	100%	

9. Background Papers

9.1 Not applicable. The SEND Funding Consultation was completed anonymously by respondents and the raw data cannot therefore be shared due to GDPR issues.

10. Next steps and future High Needs Funding Updates

10.1 Based on the positive feedback from the SEND Funding Recommendations Consultation and the support already secured from Forum members in February, WNC will now implement the funding methodologies and funding levels in the early years settings, mainstream schools and units at mainstream schools to ensure that new funding levels and any appropriate payment protection is available from 1 September.

10.2 In addition, WNC will implement any adjustments to the original recommendations that are confirmed at this Schools Forum meeting (2 July).

- 10.3 WNC will provide regular updates to Schools Forum regarding the implementation and budget tracking for the SEND Funding changes for CYP with and without EHCP Plans in early years settings, mainstream schools and units at mainstream schools. This includes tracking of the additional £2.8m of expenditure including payment protection for education providers.
- 10.4 WNC will also present 2025-26 SEND Funding recommendations for these education sectors to Forum members at the appropriate meeting during the 2024-25 academic year.
- 10.5 In addition, WNC will provide updates to Forum members on the progress of the financial modelling and funding recommendations for Further Education sector for implementation from 1 August 2025.

11. Report Author:

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