

# City of Wolverhampton Council

## SCHOOLS' FORUM

<b>Date</b>	01 July 2021
<b>Report title</b>	New Specialist Provision Start Up Fund
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### Summary

The high needs funding system supports provision for children and young people with SEND from their early years to age 25, enabling both local authorities and institutions to meet their statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014. The high needs funding block provides local authorities with resources for place funding and top-up funding for institutions, and funding for high needs services delivered directly by the authority or under a separate funding agreement with institutions (including funding devolved to institutions).

The City of Wolverhampton Council has a statutory duty to ensure that; sufficient school places are available within their area for every child of school age whose parents wish them to have one, to promote high educational standards, to ensure fair access to educational opportunity, and to help fulfil every child's educational potential. It must also ensure that there are sufficient schools in its area and promote diversity and parental choice.

### Decision

Members of Schools' Forum are recommended to:

1. Agree to the creation of a New Specialist Provision Start Up Fund budget line within the High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), with budget setting in future financial years in line with current processes.
2. Agree to the allocation from the High Needs DSG of £50,000 to each new specialist provision planned to open in the 2021-2022 financial year, amounting to £100,000 for two new resource bases.
3. To approve the creation of a New Specialist Provision Start Up Fund Guidance Document and monitoring as set out in 4.3 of the report.

## **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 An annual commissioning cycle as detailed in the DfE High Needs Funding Guidance is followed by SEN Commissioners which commissions place numbers from existing providers of all types for children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans. More details can be found here: [High needs funding arrangements: 2021 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2021-to-2022)
- 1.2 To cater for growing demand, support the development of a comprehensive graduated response and ensure the availability of effective pathways for pupils, Commissioners explore the sufficiency and effectiveness of SEN provision. SEN Commissioners analyse data and monitor for trends and projections and where it is identified that future demand will be greater than the current capacity of existing providers to deliver, will commission new specialist provision. At present, City of Wolverhampton Council do not provide pre-opening funding and have no process by which to do this other than the original capital grants.
- 1.3 The Department for Education has clear processes and funding routes for the establishment of new specialist provision, and this can be found here; [Apply to open a special or alternative provision free school - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-to-open-a-special-or-alternative-provision-free-school). The Department allocates a Project Development Grant (PDG) for any new specialist or mainstream school. The amount of each grant is dependent on the size of each project.
- 1.4 Every new project has different requirements at pre-opening phase, but the core blocks the PDG is expected to cover expenditure for are Staffing employed pre-opening, project management support, curriculum development, directly employed lead in staff, recruitment of Year 1 staff, and legal costs.

## **2.0 City of Wolverhampton Council process for new specialist provision**

- 2.1 Consideration has been given to having a similar process and budget line for any new specialist provision commissioned by City of Wolverhampton Council.
- 2.2 The New Specialist Provision Start Up Fund (NSPSUF) is proposed and intended to fund the wide range of activities that will be required to develop a proposal into a fully-fledged provision. It does not cover the capital costs of construction/refurbishment of premises. These items are covered in separately negotiated grants. Schools and Providers will not receive any on-going budget funding until it opens its doors, so everything before that point must be funded from this new fund.
- 2.3 As such, it is important to plan carefully and allocate the grant prudently so that it lasts until opening date; the council will not respond favourably to groups that do not budget thoroughly for the whole pre-opening period. Equally, if a school or provider does not spend all of the NSPSUF, then they will be able to use the money left over from it in their provision once it opens.
- 2.4 Schools and providers will need to ensure that they budget for how they will spend the grant and report their spending in a responsible and transparent manner. Before releasing any money, the council will expect a school or provider to explain how they will use the NSPSUF and require them to provide regular budget profiles and statements throughout the pre-opening period.
- 2.5 SEN Commissioners will produce a guidance document on the NSPSUF and will report to Schools Forum on an annual basis on allocations made and how they have been spent.

## **3.0 Recommendations on the budget for New Specialist Provision Start Up Fund**

- 3.1 Analysis of pre-opening costs for two new Resource Bases in the city has been undertaken with a view to identifying a standardised funding amount for any new specialist provision. On average the additional costs not covered by other grants of pre-opening for a mainstream resource bases range from £35,000-£80,000.

- 3.2 Given the need to ensure that the High Needs DSG is allocated fairly and within budget, whilst limiting the administration costs for council staffing resources, it is recommended that any new specialist provision the council commissions that a standardised award of £50,000 be allocated.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications and Next Steps**

- 4.1 The Additionality budget of the High Needs DSG is £1.13m for 2021-2022 and it is proposed to create a New Specialist Provision Start Up Fund budget line of £100,000 for 2021-2022 making this same adjustment to the Additionality budget. This is in order to allocate £50,000 to the two current new proposed specialist provisions due to open in the next financial year (St. Michael's and St. Martin's Resource Bases).
- 4.2 Create a new budget line of the High Needs DSG for the New Specialist Provision Start Up Fund to be agreed each financial year in line with current budget setting arrangements and taking into account planned new specialist provision projects for the relevant year.
- 4.3 Agree the requirement for SEN Commissioners to produce a New Specialist Provision Start Up Fund Guidance document which sets out the process for allocation of pre-opening funding for new specialist provision and how its appropriate use will be monitored.