

Cheshire East High Needs Funding Consultation

June 2019 - October 2019



1. Purpose of this Consultation

We are looking to improve the system for allocating high needs top-up funding to children and young people with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan in Cheshire East. EHC Plans are for a child or young person aged 0-25 who has special educational needs (SEN), and where it is necessary for special educational provision to be made for the child or young person in accordance with an EHC plan.

A working group established by the Schools Forum¹ have developed a proposed new model, and we would like your views on this proposal. This consultation began with a number of events in June and July 2019 to share the proposals with different groups and gather their input and feedback on the proposals and potential implementation routes. To date, consultation events have been held for: internal local authority staff; parent carers of children and young people with SEND; Headteachers, governors and SENCOs from Cheshire East mainstream schools and other interested groups from across the SEND Partnership (such as health and social care professionals).

Following this process, an online survey has been designed to gather further input on the proposals. The online survey is available at: <https://surveys.cheshireeast.gov.uk/s/HighNeedsTopUpFunding/>
All responses to the online survey must be submitted by **5pm on 11th October 2019**.

All feedback and input gathered through the consultation will contribute directly to future work around high needs funding, including directly impacting whether the proposals will proceed and the design and implementation of any future model.

For any queries about this consultation, please email SENDpartnerships@cheshireeast.gov.uk.



¹ The Schools Forum is a formal meeting of governors and headteachers elected by their colleagues to present them in relation to funding matters etc.

2. Who is this consultation for?

This consultation is for anyone affected by, or interested in, the way in which high needs top-up funding is allocated to children and young people with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan in Cheshire East. This includes:

- Children and young people with EHC Plans
- Parent carers of children or young people with EHC Plans
- Representatives from educational settings (e.g. schools), such as Headteachers, Governors and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs)
- Health commissioners or providers
- Local authority officers
- Cheshire East Councillors
- Other professionals across education, health and care

Please note that the proposal outlined in this document includes a phased approach and is initially focused on school-age children with EHC Plans within mainstream schools.

3. The current model for allocating high needs top-up funding

Using the current model, high needs top-up funding associated with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan is expressed as a number of hours of support. The allocated number of hours is agreed by a multi-agency Panel during the EHC needs assessment process, as part of agreeing the provision within the EHC Plan.

Feedback collected from various audiences (including schools, parents and Cheshire East Councillors) through numerous improvement activities relating to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) describes a number of issues with the current allocation model for high needs top-up funding. According to this feedback, the current system for allocating high needs top-up funding in Cheshire East is considered to be:

- Opaque (it is not clear how decisions are made)
- Subjective (there may be potential issues with consistency)
- Too closely linked to 'hours' of support (and therefore insufficiently flexible in terms of the support that can be provided to meet need)

Issues were also raised regarding the current system's sufficiency of funding and its ability to adequately address exceptionality (i.e. children and young people with the most complex SEN). There are also considerable expenditure pressures on the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which need to be considered. As a result, we need to ensure that funding is being used in the most efficient and effective way to meet need and that maximum use is being made of allocated funding.

In order to ensure that these views are an accurate reflection of the current system, the online consultation asks participants to provide their own views on the current model for allocating high needs top-up funding.

4. What has been done so far?

Approximately 18 months ago, the Schools Forum established a High Needs Formula Working Group to review the model for allocating high needs funding in response to the feedback outlined above. This multi-agency working group contained a large number of representatives from schools. The following sections of this document describe the work that has been undertaken by this group.

5. Proposed Principles

As an initial piece of work, the High Needs Formula Working Group developed a set of principles for a new funding allocation model.

In response to the feedback on the current model (described in section 3 above), the group has proposed the following principles for a new high needs funding allocation model:

- **Transparency** - it should be clear to everyone how funding decisions are made
- **Objectivity** - decisions should be consistent
- **Sufficiency and ability to address exceptionality** – the model should provide funding to meet needs effectively, and be flexible enough to do so even in exceptional cases
- **Flexibility** – it should be possible to use funding flexibly to meet the child/young person's individual needs
- **Acknowledgement of increasing demand and costs** – should be more efficient and flexible use of the High Needs budget to meet need

6. Links to the Cheshire East Toolkit for SEND

To aid transparency and consistency of decision making, the working group also feel it is crucial that any funding model used in Cheshire East aligns with other documents, systems and processes used to identify and assess children and young people with SEND - [including the Cheshire East Toolkit for SEND](#).

The Toolkit for SEND outlines the provision and support that Cheshire East Council expects to be in place in all educational settings which support Cheshire East children and young people with SEND. Its purpose is to provide detailed guidance on how educational settings can identify children and young people with different types and levels of need, and information on appropriate steps and strategies to support them. This detailed information is presented in a series of **Graduated Approach** tables within the Cheshire East Toolkit for SEND.

Using the Graduated Approach means recognising that there is a continuum of need and that needs are met through the addition of increasingly specialist interventions as the level of need increases. However, it is important to recognise that this support should **not** be viewed exclusively as individual teaching assistant (TA) support. Indeed, studies have signalled the clear need for change in the way TAs are deployed in schools in order to ensure their effectiveness, and have shown that individual TA support is not necessarily the most effective mechanism of support for children and young people. For example, the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff Project (carried out over a five year period and commissioned by national government bodies) found a **consistent negative relationship** between the amount of teaching assistant (TA) support received and the progress made by pupils in mainstream primary and secondary schools in maths, English and science.

The current methodology of expressing top-up funding associated with EHC Plans in terms of 'hours' of support incorrectly suggests that support must be provided exclusively by individual teaching assistant (TA) support. The Graduated Approach tables within our Toolkit include a range of flexible strategies to support children and young people with different types and levels of need which are not centred solely on individual TA support, including use of equipment, small groups and environmental changes. Any new funding model should therefore support implementation of these strategies, allow flexibility in how support is arranged and not be expressed in terms of 'hours' of support.

7. Considered Options

The High Needs Formula Working Group researched high needs funding arrangements used in other areas, whilst considering their proposed principles. As the intention is to move away from describing provision in hours, other local authority models based on an hourly rate were

discounted. The group looked at a number of models used elsewhere in detail. As part of this work, the group carefully considered the positives and negatives of each model, and carried out financial modelling by applying the different models to the current level of need within Cheshire East.

Several different local authorities have been considered where a banding system is used, including:

- Blackburn with Darwen
- Cheshire West and Chester
- East Riding of Yorkshire
- Essex
- Trafford
- Warrington

8. The proposed new model

After closely examining models used elsewhere across the country, the High Needs Formula Working Group favours the development of a model in Cheshire East based on the **matrix model** introduced by Essex County Council. The group favoured this model as it utilises an approach which is both clearly needs-led and similar to the structure used within our Toolkit for SEND - this was less apparent with the other models.

This model provides top-up funding in **financial amounts** (instead of in hours) in line with a number of bands.

In addition, the model uses a '**needs-led**' approach where the appropriate financial band is determined for each individual child or young person through the completion of a **Banding Descriptors 'matrix'** with descriptions of different types and levels of SEN. The matrix structure therefore mirrors the structure of our Cheshire East Toolkit for SEND. Implementing a similar model in Cheshire East would allow for the development of a funding model that can be aligned with our existing identification and support mechanisms.

The Banding Descriptors Matrix used by Essex County Council

The aim of the proposed system is to link the allocation of funding with the individual needs of a child or young person.

The Banding Descriptors Matrix used by Essex County Council allocates columns to particular types of SEN (in line with the SEND Code of Practice). Each type of need is then described in levels 0 – 6.

- Level 0 represents the Universal level of need that can be met with the Key Stage element 1 funding, known as the age weighted pupil unit (AWPU).
- Level 1 represents the SEN Support level of need that is expected to be met from the element 2 funding which is available without an EHC Plan, and comes from the schools block funding.
- Level 2 upwards represents the element 3 pupil led top-up funding which comes from the high needs block.

When the Banding Descriptors Matrix is being completed for a particular child or young person, it should be completed to fully reflect their individual needs and indicate their individual level of need for each type of SEN. Each square on the Banding Descriptors Matrix has then been allocated a point score with a weighting to reflect the impact that the described needs will usually have on the provision that will be required. The Excel version of the Banding Descriptors Matrix will indicate the band associated with the score. Essex County Council has 10 bands which each represent a different financial value. The system aims to secure a more accurate sum for each pupil's individual needs than the current model.

Our proposal is that schools and professionals (e.g. an Educational Psychologist or specialist teacher) who know the child will independently complete the Banding Matrix based on the child or young person's individual needs.

The EHC needs assessment panel will consider this information and all the evidence available through the EHC needs assessment and/or annual review (which includes views from young people and parent carers) to identify a 'best fit' on the matrix and the appropriate band, which provides an indication of the money that will be needed for the required provision set out in the EHC Plan. The decision will be made through a discussion and is not just determined once the matrix is completed. More detailed discussions will be required where there are discrepancies in the proposed band and for exceptional cases.

Established controls and moderation processes will also need to be put in place to ensure that decision making remains consistent, equitable and transparent and that funding remains within overall budget constraints.

The proposed model will require a cultural shift and will not necessarily give schools additional funding but will give them greater flexibility in how they use the funding. It will support inclusive schools as those with more SEN pupils will have greater flexibility. The proposed model will also have a greater link to the needs of children and young people and further support the embedding of the Cheshire East Toolkit for SEND.

9. Next steps for development and implementation

Designing our Banding Descriptors Matrix

In order to implement a model similar to that used by Essex County Council within Cheshire East, we need to ensure that the content of the Banding Descriptors matrix closely aligns with the Cheshire East Continuum of Need and the Graduated Approach tables provided within the Cheshire East Toolkit for SEND. This work is already underway through coproduction between local authority officers, local SENCOs and a range of local professionals from across education, health and care. Further detailed input on the matrix content was also gathered at the consultation events held in June and July 2019.

Following advice from Essex County Council, it is proposed that we look to develop the model in stages, with an **initial focus on mainstream schools**. Other age groups (such as early years and post-16) and other setting types (including special schools and resource provisions) will be considered in a later phase.

Pilot

Appropriate financial values for each funding band also need to be determined through detailed modelling at a school level.

As the new model is fundamentally different to our current 'hour' based model, a feasibility pilot will be undertaken in a small number of mainstream schools (approx. 12 schools) with different demographics in order to determine impact, guarantee feasibility and determine appropriate banding values before a new model is implemented across all mainstream schools using a phased implementation process.

The pilot will begin in September 2019 and will run for the entire 2019/2020 academic year. The learning from the pilot will directly influence the next steps on this improvement work, and we will use this learning to make any necessary changes to the matrix content and/or weightings, and the financial bands.

Implementation

If evidence from this consultation and the pilot support implementation of the new proposed funding allocation model, we propose that it should be applied to all new Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments from September 2020.

We also propose rolling out the new model to children and young people with existing EHC Plans in phases from September 2020, but this can be done in different ways – for example:

- At annual reviews of EHC Plans
- Applying it to selected year groups over different years
- Applying it to selected schools over different years

As part of the consultation events, we asked attendees to discuss and provide feedback on their preferred phased approach for implementation. Attendees also discussed and provided feedback in relation to how long the implementation should take. The online survey provides further opportunity for individuals to provide feedback regarding their views on how a phased implementation should be approached, and how long it should take.

The approach taken must allow for a feasible workload for schools and the Local Authority SEND and finance teams. The feedback from the consultation will be used to determine the final implementation approach and timescales, and these will be shared with the other findings of the consultation and pilot.

Proposed Timeline

April – August 2019	Prepare Cheshire East matrix document with schools and education, health and care professionals
June 2019	Brief elected Cheshire East Councillors (Portfolio holder and Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee)
Early June 2019	Consultation event with local authority staff
Late June / Early July 2019	Consultation events with mainstream schools (Headteachers, Governors and SENCOs), parent carers and other partners
17th June 2019	Presentation at SENCO Conference
19th July 2019 – 11th October 2019	Online consultation
June – July 2019	Identify pilot schools
June – September 2019	Propose financial banding amounts to be used for Pilot
May – September 2019	Agree controls and moderation processes
July – November 2019	Analyse consultation findings and results
August 2019	Agree matrix model and processes to be used for Pilot
September 2019 – December 2019	Pilot schools – ‘virtual’ banding of children and young people with EHC Plans on proposed Matrix
February 2020	Pilot schools – advised of new funding for next financial year (2020/21) based on proposed Matrix results
February 2020 – September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review learning from pilot • Share learning and consult on proposed changes (if required) • Make final changes to Matrix and banding amounts
February 2020 – September 2020	All schools/SEND team/other professionals - Training on final Matrix
September 2020 – December 2020	All schools – ‘virtual’ banding of ‘selected’ pupils.

	(implementation route to be clarified using input from consultation)
Feb 2021	All schools – advised of new funding for next financial year (2021/22) based on proposed Matrix results
Ongoing	All schools - implementation for all pupils (in line with agreed roll-out methodology)