

**DARLINGTON SCHOOLS FORUM  
HIGH NEEDS MONITORING SUB-GROUP  
27<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

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**LOW INCIDENCE NEEDS UPDATE  
Request for Additional Funding Low Incidence Team – Hurworth Primary School**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. A request for additional funding for the low incidence (LINS) team (supporting children with visual and hearing impairments), based at Hurworth Primary School, has been received in order for the service to continue to be provided in the academic year 2023/24. At this stage a cost pressure of £38,733k per annum has been identified comprising:
  - £25,330 to respond to the service budget deficit
  - £13,403 to enable an increase in contracted hours to respond to the increased case load and complexity.

**Background and current position**

2. A paper was prepared by the Lingfield Education Trust in April 2023 outlining the significant financial challenges in delivering the service within the budget provided. The budget for this service is from the high needs block and has remained unchanged since 2014, during which time there has been a number of costs absorptions into the budget which includes funding the subcontracting of the Habilitation Service to a value of £6,335 per annum. No inflationary uplifts award have been made for this service since 2014.
3. The LINS budget in its current form is almost entirely consumed by staffing costs which following a 0.2FTE increase in capacity to respond to increasing service demand will see 92% of the budget allocated to exclusively to direct staffing costs. The level of apportioned costs has been further compounded by the fact that the staff posts designated to the service delivery have not been able to have costs increases such as the employers teachers pensions contributions and teacher pay awards met through grant awards or broader budget uplifts so have had to be absorbed within the existing service budget.
4. A review of the LINS budget has been undertaken by the Interim Head of Service, SEND & Inclusion and Senior Commissioning Manager, this review has reviewed all service overhead lines and undertaken a comparison with the actual costs incurred from the service delivery during the academic year 2022/23. This has identified that the cost pressure is as a direct result of costs incurred from this specific service delivery and there are no margins for reduction within the overhead budget line at this stage. Cost apportionments in the service related to overheads have been arrived at using the square metre space of the service (bespoke built from previous council capital award) apportioned against the schools operating costs. **(Appendix 1)**
5. The only feasible way of reducing costs would be to remodel, reduce and rescope the service whilst ensuring statutory service duties are fulfilled. This will require a designated period of time working in partnership with the service and therefore in the interim the service will need to be stabilised through the funding of the service budget pressure.

### **Presenting Risk**

6. Lingfield Education Trust have been expressly clear that the service cannot be provided without this budgetary uplift. In the interim period whilst a decision has been awaited on the budget uplift, this has caused unintentional detriment to Hurworth Primary school who have had to pause on the recruitment of a TA whilst they are subsidising the service.
7. The service is a specified statutory duty and therefore the service cannot cease.

### **Next Steps**

8. In light of the cost pressure being experienced by the service in order to deliver the current contracted requirements, a funding award of £38,733 is to be made to stabilise the service and resolve the detriment that Lingfield Education Trust is experiencing in delivering this service.
9. A detailed review of the service will be prioritised to ascertain whether any elements of the service configuration are above statutory minimum and whether a feasible remodelling opportunity is available.
10. Further work will be undertaken with finance around the inflationary budget build for the resource base and outreach services as to not award any form of inflationary uplift for a number of years, is in the longer term, resulting in statutory service instability as now experienced by the LINS. An inflation index aligned award each year since 2014 would have significantly offset the cost pressure now being experienced.

### **Recommendation**

11. High Needs Forum monitoring sub-group to note an interim service stabilisation payment from the High Needs Block budget to the LINS service valued at £38,733 subject to further service review being undertaken to explore service remodelling opportunities.

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