

Cheshire East High Needs Funding Consultation

2023



Purpose of this Consultation

We are looking to improve the system for allocating high needs top-up funding for 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 High Needs Funding Working group made up of school representatives, Cheshire East Council employees and Cheshire East Parent Carer Forum representatives have developed a new model, and plans to introduce the new model, and we would like your views on these proposals. An online consultation survey has been designed to gather further views on the proposals. This consultation, and the work leading up to it, build upon previous work in this area (from 2017 onwards) and feedback from previous consultations (held in 2019).

To take part in this consultation, please complete the online survey available at:

https://surveys.cheshireeast.gov.uk/s/High_Needs_Top_Up_Funding_Consultation_2023/

Completing the online consultation should take no more than 10 minutes.

All responses to the online survey must be submitted **by xxxxxx**

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

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 for children and young people with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan in Cheshire East. This includes:

- Children and young people with EHC Plans
- Parents/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 staff members
- Cheshire East Councillors
- Other professionals across education, health and care



OFFICIAL

Summary – what does this mean for individual children with EHC Plans?

This section provides a quick summary of what this consultation is about. Please do read the rest of this document for further detail.

- In the current model used in Cheshire East, high needs top-up funding associated with an individual Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan is expressed as a number of hours of support on each individual EHC Plan.
- Using hours to express a total funding amount can cause confusion, as it doesn't reflect how the special educational needs provision identified in Section F is delivered, or the ways someone can receive support to best meet their individual needs (such as small group work, or using specialised software or equipment for example).
- In the new model, the total top-up funding for each individual EHC Plan will be expressed as a financial amount in line with an allocated band.
- The proposed change relates only to how the **total funding** is expressed in the EHC Plan, in order to remove confusion and accurately represent how flexible support can and should be provided via many different methods.
- Regardless of how total funding is expressed, the support that each child or young person requires to meet their needs will still be described through personalised and detailed provision descriptions in sections F, G and H in EHC Plans (in line with legal requirements).
- The group plan to move existing individual EHC Plans to the new model at their next review.

- The new model will be implemented for school-aged children with EHC Plans in mainstream schools **only** in the first instance.



The current model

In the current model used in Cheshire East, high needs top-up funding associated with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan is expressed as a **number of hours of support** on each individual EHC Plan – however:

- Hours are used only as a proxy (nominal) measure to express total funding.
- Using hours to express a total funding amount can cause confusion, as it doesn't reflect how the special educational needs provision identified in Section F is delivered in practice (such as small group work, or using specialised software or equipment for example).
- The focus should always be on meeting the individual needs of the child or young person through personalised provision listed in section F.

What has been done so far?

This work has been ongoing for several years, and has involved input and joint working between different interested groups at various points, along with previous extensive consultation activities.

In 2017, a task and finish group of elected members chosen by the council's Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee carried out an in-depth review of local SEN processes. The group's final report (agreed by the committee in 2018) included a recommendation *"that the Schools Forum be requested to review the distribution and methodology of funding"* and further specifically stated that *"a banding system should be considered. Parents find hourly funding confusing"*.

In early 2018, the Cheshire East Schools' Forum established a High Needs Formula Working Group (HNFWG) to review the

model for allocating high needs funding in response to feedback on the current model. As an initial piece of work, the HNFWG used the feedback to develop a set of principles for a new funding allocation model.

Following research into a number of models in place across the country (whilst considering the proposed principles), the HNFWG favoured the development of a model in Cheshire East based on the matrix model introduced by Essex County Council from September 2017. This model provides top-up funding in financial amounts in line with a number of bands, as opposed to a value in hours. In addition, in this model, 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.

During 2019, extensive face to face and online consultation was undertaken with all interested groups on the proposed principles and model developed by the HNFWG. Overall, the principles and model received positive feedback in both the face to face and online consultations, and also when shared for scrutiny and challenge in a variety of other forums, thereby supporting continued exploration of the proposed model. We also listened to any concerns or queries that were raised. All input from the consultation activities was taken forward and used to inform future work on the model.

An initial feasibility pilot (now referred to as 'Pilot Phase 1') was launched in September 2019. From December 2019, the project team carried out an in-depth analysis of information submitted by the pilot schools. Although feedback on using the matrix was positive, the analysis returned a number of issues that required further consideration. As a result, the analysis phase of this pilot was extended.

The project team met with individual pilot schools to further discuss their experiences, and used the feedback from the pilot schools and the consultation activities to work with various professionals on amendments to the matrix wording, weightings and formulae, whilst also considering potential format changes. In late 2020, we established plans to run a second phase of the pilot immediately after the February 2021 half-term break (the work leading up to this is now referred to as 'Pilot Phase 2a'). However, these plans had to be re-evaluated in 2021 as a result of the third national lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic and then the subsequent announcement of a return date for all pupils back into schools.

In December 2021, we re-established a High Needs Funding Working Group, who then oversaw and lead on a further pilot phase. This pilot looked specifically at the impact for schools, children/young people and parents/carers of moving from expressing funding in hours to bands with financial amounts. This phase was referred to as 'Pilot Phase 2b' and was carried out with real Cheshire East pupils in local schools. Analysis undertaken by and shared with the working group indicated that this pilot phase went very well with positive feedback and trends from schools, parents/carers and children and young people. As a result, the working group agreed to pursue next steps with the piloted change, including planning how such a model could be implemented across Cheshire East, subject to approval.

The proposed new model

The key proposals for implementation are as follows:

- Moving from expressing total funding for EHC Plans in hours to a banding model developed and piloted by the working group. Under the new model, top-up funding will be allocated in **financial amounts in line with a number of bands** as shown on this page.

Band	Hours From	Hours to	Hours (round up)	Top-Up Amount
0	0	12	0	£ -
1	12.1	15	15	£1,700
2	15.1	18	18	£3,210
3	18.1	20	20	£4,230
4	20.1	22	22	£5,250
5	22.1	25	25	£6,800
6	25.1	28	28	£8,340
7	28.1	30	30	£9,370
8	30.1	32.5	32.5	£10,700

- Hours are shown here only to demonstrate how the initial move to the new model will work for **existing** EHC Plans. There will be no reference to a funding total in hours in the new model going forward.
- The new model will be implemented for school-aged children with EHC Plans in mainstream schools only in the first instance.
- The group plan to undertake a staged roll out by moving existing EHC Plans to the new model at their next review.
- The implementation date for starting to move new and existing EHC Plans to the new model is yet to be confirmed and will be planned based on further discussions around required actions along with the feedback received through this consultation.

Further information on the proposals

Moving from hours to bands

Many Cheshire East schools already undertake a range of flexible support strategies to meet the needs of each individual child with an EHC Plan. This includes the use of small group work, equipment or specialised software for example. Changing from expressing total funding in 'hours' to a band with a financial amount would better support and reflect this, modernise our systems and remove any confusion.

Under the new model, agreed provision will remain focused on meeting individual needs – as it is now. The proposals simply relate to how the total funding allocation is expressed in an EHC Plan. The proposed change is also in line with Department for Education (DfE) guidance which recommends the need to move to a national banding system for SEND High Needs Funding. Therefore, where a child's individual needs are being optimally met by existing support mechanisms (including 1:1 support), their individual provision is unlikely to change upon moving to the new model. Likewise, in schools where a range of support is already in place, there may be very little or no difference to individual support when the new model is implemented (as found in the recent pilot). However, removing the use of hours (which incorrectly implies that support can only be delivered via 1:1 support from an individual) and introducing the proposed banding model supports the flexibility to try different types of provision to meet need where it may be beneficial for a child or young person.

Financial impact

This work has been ongoing for several years. It is **not** part of any plans around reducing the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Deficit and is not intended as a cost cutting exercise.

The suggested change in funding model is about **flexibility** and specifically about accurately representing how flexible support can and should be provided via many different methods (not just through 'hours' of support from an individual).

When developing the proposed model of bands and associated amounts, the HNFWG were mindful that, whilst this change in allocation model is not about cutting costs, it could not be used as a means of increasing spend either and must not result in a further spend increase, especially due to overspend in our Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Therefore, the financial impact of the change in allocation model is intended to be **neutral** and **sustainable**.

Implementation plans

The group favour changing to the new model for individual EHC Plans at the point of their next review for a number of reasons including:

- it will prevent changes being made to individual EHC Plans twice in 1 year
- it will allow the change to be discussed during the next review and ensure that discussions continue to focus on provision
- we only need to communicate the change to all interested groups once (if we used a system lasting several years with different roll out stages, several reminders and separate communications may be needed).

Aligning other changes

To be as efficient as possible (and prevent further changes being needed later on), we intend to make sure other planned changes to EHC Plan formatting are brought in at the same time as the above proposals.

In addition to the above proposals, we are listening to feedback and simplifying EHC Plan templates, meaning that there will be no 'total allocated resources' box or allocated funding band on individual EHC Plans going forward. This section is not used on many EHC plans already (including those for children and young people in specialist provision or post-16 settings for example) and will allow for better consistency. The remainder of Section F, with all detailed and specified provision, and all other sections will remain the same. The simplified plan format will be implemented alongside the new funding allocation model; this implementation date is yet to be confirmed and will be planned based on further discussions around required actions along with the feedback received through this consultation. After the agreed implementation date, the simplified format will be used for all EHC Plans following their next review. Details of the band that has been allocated for individual EHC Plans will be included on the letter shared with the Final EHC Plan.

Next steps

The proposal to proceed with implementation of the new model, including outcomes and input from this consultation, will be taken to the Council's Children and Families Committee for a final decision.

The working group will ensure that a range of communications are shared widely throughout 2023 to provide updates and further opportunities for all interested groups to learn more about this work.