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| **Norfolk Schools Forum** | C/O Marilyn Edgeley, Clerk to Norfolk Schools ForumOn behalf of X, Y, Z ForumsEmail: marilyn.edgeley@norfolk.gov.uk Direct dial: 01603 223546 |
| The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson, MP Secretary of State for EducationVia email:gavin.williamson.mp@parliament.uk  | X July 2021 |

Dear Mr Williamson

We are writing to you as a group of Eastern Region Schools Forums to express our collective concerns regarding the level of High Needs Block funding. This, combined with the lack of capital funding to invest in maintained, academy and free special schools, puts Schools Forums and Local Authorities in an incredibly difficult and potentially confrontational position that undermines effective working relationships.

We are writing to you jointly to underline the critical nature and urgency of the situation that many of us are facing.

Schools Forums and Local Authorities should have robust, professional and courteous discussions, and given the current funding challenges, these will be particularly focussed upon High Needs Block spend and Dedicated Schools Grant deficit recovery.

The current regulations and DfE expectations place Schools Forums in extremely difficult positions. They feel that they cannot support reductions to school budgets through block transfers, or increasing block transfers, in the absence of an adequate national plan for High Needs Block funding and recovery. In addition, they do not wish to move to more adversarial relationships with local authorities, as this will not lead to improvements in outcomes, particularly for children and young people requiring high SEND.

The system as a whole is underfunded; the DfE recently undertook a High Needs Block consultation; this consultation showed that the system had been under-funded for multiple years for many LAs, which will have contributed to the ongoing deficits. The proposal being consulted upon did not propose back-dated funding to mitigate this under-funding whilst also proposing the there would be a cap on ‘gains’, meaning that many authorities would continue to be under-funded (including, Norfolk, a n other, etc…). Whilst we welcome the link between the High Needs Block consultation this year and subsequent consultations linked to the outcome of the National SEND Review, we are concerned to hear that it is now likely that SEND Review outcome will now be set out by the DfE in the autumn rather than spring/summer 2021 as planned.  If the consultation on the SEND Review does not start early in the autumn term then it is likely that strategic planning between LA’s and School’s Forums for the FY 2022/23 will be further compromised.

Whilst some Eastern Region local authorities currently feel that they have sufficient funding currently, this is not the same for all authorities and, as an overall group, the authorities are running at a significant deficit.

The Society of County Treasurers recently understood a survey of Member authorities and the results showed…. Xxx…. Shires badly hit, etc.

As Schools Forums, we understand the vital role that capital investment could play in supporting the recovery of the High Needs Block, meaning placements can move from expensive independent provision into maintained / academy / free special schools. This funding has not been sufficiently forthcoming from central government for many years and recent announcements are a ‘drop in the ocean’ compared to the level of funding to meet the place needs of children with high SEND. Investing in the right provision would deliver significant revenue benefits for high needs spending nationally; it would not be acceptable to have insufficient mainstream places to meet basic needs.

Our Forums will continue to work alongside our respective colleagues from local authorities with the aim of addressing and mitigating these issues within the resources available, wherever possible.

Yours faithfully,

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| **Martin White** Chair of Norfolk Schools Forum | **A N Other**Other Forums |
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