

Member Forum

13 December 2016

Statements from councillors



Procedural note:

STATEMENTS FROM COUNCILLORS:

- A maximum of 1 minute shall be allowed for the presentation of each statement (subject to overall time constraints).
- There shall be no debate on the statements and the Lord Mayor shall refer them to the Mayor for information/consideration.
- Statements will be dealt with in the order of receipt (subject to time).

The following member statement has been submitted – full details are attached:

CS 01 - Cllr Ruth Pickersgill – Funding of Bristol's schools





STATEMENT CS 01

I am sure Members have all seen the headlines relating to the National Union of Teachers' report, which compared 2014/15 and 2016/17 funding for schools, and found that 83% of schools are worse off, **and that Bristol schools were the worst hit in the whole country being £540 worse off per pupil under this Government.** The report showed that the most deprived schools were worst hit, losing £297 per pupil at primary level and £338 at secondary, compared to the least deprived losing only £93 and £178. Funnily enough Labour authorities like ours seem to be worst hit! This is at a time that Philip Hammond has just announced £240 million in the Autumn statement to expand grammar schools. 1000 LA schools nationally and 100 Academy Trusts are already in debt - there is a crisis in education funding and it is impacting on our children and their life chances.

The methodology for allocating schools funding is incredibly complex, and much of the difficult decision making takes place through the Schools Forum, who are expected to deal with the devastating impact of the Government's policies. I wanted to make this statement to ensure all Members are aware of what is going on in two particular areas:

- We have a crisis in High Needs funding (funding for those children with additional needs, some of the most vulnerable in our City). At the end of 15/16, we were £4.6m overspent. This is not due to mismanagement, but due to increasing demand and the Government's cunning plan to give responsibility to Local Authorities for post 16 and 19-25 high needs pupils' funding, without giving the level of resources needed to do it. Our children have increasingly complex needs, and having specialist provision like the Children's Hospital and Claremont special school mean parents are keen to live here. The number of schools applying for what is called 'top up funding' is increasing dramatically (this is when they don't feel they can support the child's effectively with their basic funding, as they may need a Learning Support Assistant or other help). This is a human rights issue, and it can't be done on the cheap, and our schools have a good reputation for including children with really complex needs in mainstream settings, but we can't expect schools to subsidise this support with their already overstretched budgets. In addition, there has been a rise in the number of permanent secondary exclusions which lead to costly alternative provision. (Ironically if academies exclude, the LA then picks up the bill for alternative provision).

The Schools' Forum has had to make drastic decisions and has already cut funding to special schools by 5% from Sept, and has reduced the rates for top up funding, and officers are working with schools on reducing exclusions through a new panel, but we are still looking at a 1.9m deficit. Our schools are not getting the funding they need to support our most vulnerable children, and

there is so little we can do to improve the situation. We are being forced to do the Government's dirty work for them.

- The other pernicious, politically driven cut is to the grant that the LA gets to fund the central services that support our mainstream schools from £113.17 per pupil in 14.15 to £15 a head in 17/18, reducing our Education Services Grant by £2.2 million. This is the money we have to use to support our strategic planning, work on key areas such as health and safety, equality, education welfare, HR, asset management. This is a deliberate attempt to force us to give up on supporting our maintained schools so they are forced to become academies, which we will not do!

I am calling on the Mayor to make the strongest representations to the Government on their deliberate, politically motivated policy of starving schools and local authorities of resources, a policy which is already hitting the most disadvantaged children as well as those with additional needs.

Councillor Ruth Pickersgill