

West Berkshire Schools' Forum

Title of Report:	Engaging Potential
Date of Meeting:	14th July 2014
Contact Officer(s)	Jane Seymour

For Decision

1. Background

- 1.1 West Berkshire Council has a contract with an organisation called Engaging Potential to provide education for up to 14 young people with severe Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD).
- 1.2 Places are reserved for young people who have a Statement of Special Educational Needs for BESD and for whom no other provision is available. In many cases these will be young people who have been permanently excluded, sometimes from more than one school, and whose needs cannot be met in a mainstream school or in a Pupil Referral Unit. Some students will have attended specialist BESD schools but may have been unsuccessful even in that type of specialist environment. The cohort includes young people with very complex difficulties. Some will be known to the Youth Offending Team and some may have substance abuse / mental health difficulties. All of the students require very intensive and personalised support in order to complete their statutory schooling and achieve a positive outcome. Many will have a long history of disengagement and so will need a high level of support to re engage. Often students will have significant learning difficulties such as dyslexia which may not have been properly addressed which increases their complexity.
- 1.3 Engaging Potential offers places primarily to students in Years 10 to 12, although some students may be taken in Year 9. All admissions are through the SEN Panel. The provision is registered for boys and girls, although girls were only admitted for the first time in the current academic year. The provision operates from Council owned premises on Gaywood Drive, Progress House.
- 1.4 Engaging Potential have been successful in achieving good outcomes for the majority of their students, including students going on to FE college, apprenticeships and employment.
- 1.5 The annual cost of the provision is £440,129 which equates to a unit cost per pupil of £31,438 per annum. This level of funding has not changed since 2010. This represents extremely good value for money compared to

the cost of a BESD school place; these start from approximately £60,000 to £70,000 per annum for a day place and can be significantly more expensive.

2. Proposed increase to Engaging Potential budget.

2.1 Over the last four years the provision at Engaging Potential has needed to evolve to meet the changing needs of its population. This has created budget pressures resulting in the Head of the Centre making a request for additional resources.

2.2 The main reasons for the additional costs are as follows:

- It has not been possible to do as much group work as was previously possible as the cohort of young people is becoming more challenging. Due to the negative dynamics between some young people, many of whom may know each other outside of school, and due to the volatility and potential for aggression or violence on the part of some students, it has been necessary to set up completely individualised programmes for most students. This is obviously more costly than providing tutoring and activities in groups. Group activities are still encouraged where possible, as the importance of developing social skills is acknowledged, but there are limitations to this for safety reasons. This means that additional teaching and teaching assistant capacity is needed and additional funding for students to engage in a variety of off site activities tailored to their particular individual interests and strengths.
- The main focus of the project was originally to support young people through one to one mentoring and access to a range of activities either individually or in groups. There was some input from qualified teachers in basic skills but this represented a relatively small proportion of the students' programmes. Mentors all have a recognised qualification in mentoring but they are not qualified teachers. Mentors used by Engaging Potential are highly skilled at working with disengaged young people and they still form an essential part of each young person's package of support. However, we have been encouraging the project managers to increase the focus on education and provide a broader range of qualifications, including GCSEs, which were not originally offered. This requires a restructuring to replace some of the mentoring capacity with additional teaching capacity, at a higher cost.
- The project has had a higher level of staff turnover than is desirable, partly due to the fact that salaries, particularly for teaching staff, were not competitive when compared to teaching salaries in schools. This needs to be addressed so that high quality staff are attracted to the provision and are retained in post.
- Training costs have also increased in order to ensure the setting is fully compliant with all necessary requirements and because of the changing profile of the population, which more recently has included students with autism and challenging behaviours.

- 2.3 Engaging Potential have sought to reduce their costs where possible in order to offset some of these pressures. For example, they have reduced management and administrative costs, reduced mentor salaries, and reduced costs for volunteers, room hire and IT. However, in order to meet the pressures outlined above, they are seeking an annual increase in their budget from £440,129 to £524,033, an increase of £83,904 per annum. This would increase the unit cost per student from £31,438 to £37,431, an increase of £5,993 per student per annum.
- 2.4 These additional costs are considered to be reasonable given the way the project has evolved, changes in the client group, the need to deliver highly individualised programmes and the requirement to increase the educational content of each student's programme. A unit cost of £37,431 still represents very good value for money considering the highly challenging nature of the target group and compared to the cost of a BESD school placement at £60,000 to £70,000 per annum minimum.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Schools' Forum is asked to consider meeting these additional costs from the High Needs Block with effect from September 2014. The pro rata cost for September 2014 to March 2015 would be **£48,944** and will be a virement from the High Needs contingency. The full year cost in 2015-16 will be **£83,904**.