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## MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 21 JUNE 2016

### **Present:**

#### **Primary School Head Teachers/Representatives**

Ms J Hirst, Bispham Endowed Church of England Primary School  
Ms S Diver, Mereside Primary School and Children's Centre

#### **Special School Head Teacher/Head Teacher Representative**

Mr C Andrew, Woodlands School

#### **Academy School Representatives**

Mr S Brennand, Unity Academy  
Ms J Carroll, Roseacre Primary Academy  
Mr M Gray, Waterloo Primary Academy  
Ms T Harrison, Thames Primary Academy  
Mr N Hodgkins, Devonshire Primary Academy (Chairman)  
Mr D Medcalf, St George's School: A Church of England Academy

#### **Post-16 Representative**

Ms C Hill, Blackpool and Fylde College

#### **Non-Schools Members**

Ms C Butterworth, Primary School Governor  
Ms A Baines, Staff/Teacher Associations  
Mr R Rendell, Early Years Strategic Group

#### **In Attendance:**

Councillor Cross, Cabinet Member for Reducing Health Inequalities and Adult Safeguarding  
Mr M Golden, Finance Manager  
Ms Sara McCartan, Service Manager Children's Centres (ITEM 8)  
Dr Simon Jenner, Principal Educational Psychologist/Service Manager Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (ITEM 9)  
Mr P Sharples, Schools Funding and PFI Manager  
Ms Amanda Whitehead, Head Universal Services and School Effectiveness (ITEM11/12)  
Mr C Williams, Democratic Governance Adviser (Minutes)  
Mr K Wood, Integrated Commissioning Manager (ITEM 8)

### **1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Wendy Casson, Pupil Referral Unit, Mr Dave Dickinson, Staff/Teacher representative, Mr Graeme Dowe, Anchorsholme and Ms Hilary Shaw, Head of Business Support and Resources.

### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interests on this occasion.

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### **3 MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Cross, Cabinet Member for Reducing Health Inequalities and Adult Safeguarding to the meeting.

The Forum noted that following Highfield Humanities College conversion to Academy status on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016, there would no longer be a requirement for a Maintained Secondary School representative and as such Becky Foxton had left the Forum membership. Also, following Amanda Pickup's decision to leave Blackpool Sixth Form College, a decision had been made to alternate the post 16 representative place jointly between Blackpool Sixth Form College and Blackpool and Fylde College members.

The Chairman announced that he would be standing down as a Forum member after the meeting and retiring as a teacher at the end of the school year. The Vice Chairman thanked Mr Hodgkins for all his hard work and valued input as Chairman of the Forum and for his service and dedication to the teaching profession more generally. The Forum echoed the Vice Chairman's sentiments and wished Mr Hodgkins well for the future.

The Forum agreed that as the Chairman would be leaving the Forum, the election of a new Chairman would take place at the January 2017 meeting and Ms Jo Hirst, as Vice Chairman, would Chair the October 2016 meeting.

### **4 MINUTES OF THE LAST SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING**

The minutes of the Schools Forum held on 15 March 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Dr Simon Jenner, Principal Educational Psychologist/ Service Manager, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities advised that in relation to the minutes and the number of Special Support Assistants in Blackpool, the number had since been further reduced to 29 through a combination of natural reduction and voluntary redundancies.

### **5 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

- (a) Mr Paul Sharples, Schools Funding and PFI Manager, advised that in relation to funding implications of the Project Search programme designed to provide education and work experience opportunities to young people (post 16) with learning difficulties, 12 places had been approved by the Education Funding Agency (EFA). The programme would be led by Mike Taplin, Senior Manager, Early Help for Children and Families. In addition, the Forum was advised that annual reviews would be undertaken to identify those students who best met the programmes eligibility criteria. Limitations with current funding were noted as a potential barrier to future expansion of Project Search.
- (b) Mr Paul Sharples advised that in relation to the first phase of a two stage consultation regarding Department for Education Schools National Funding Formula, which ended on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2016, further information would be published following the politically sensitive period up until and including the European Referendum on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016.

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### 6 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT YEAR END BUDGET REPORT 2015/2016

Mr Mark Golden, Finance Manager, presented the Dedicated Schools Grant Year End Budget Report 2015/2016.

He advised that overall for the year there had been a £19,000 overspend. Members expressed concerns with increasing costs associated with the Pupil Referral Unit particularly and the £228,000 overspend, relating to top-up funding. Also, despite a reduction in the number of centrally employed Special Support Assistants, there had still been an overspend reported, due to slower than anticipated natural reduction of staff.

The Forum also noted that two year old grant overspend had been reduced to £56,000 from the forecast £419,000 at the previous Forum. It was acknowledged that 2 Year Old Grant received was adjusted in February 2016 to take into account January 2016 Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) data. Following a question about the uptake and accuracy of forecasting of two year old grant spending, Mr Paul Sharples advised that he had been tasked with a piece of work to investigate forecasting of Two Year Grant, and Three and Four Year Old Grant, to improve the accuracy of reporting.

Mr Mark Golden reported that with reference to the Dedicated Schools Grant Reserves, as of March 31<sup>st</sup> 2016, £2,020,071 would be carried forward into the 2016/2017 financial year. He added that Committed Reserves totalled £840,204, leaving uncommitted reserves of £1,179,867.

The Forum was advised that the balances held by maintained schools as of 31 March 2016 amounted to £3.159m, which equated to a £256,000 increase on the £2.903m equivalent balances held at the end of the previous financial year. Mr Golden reported that as a result of in year academy conversions, balances had been reduced by £103,000. He added that he would review those schools that had planned to use reserves in 2016/2017.

In relation to a query about future funding of the School's Safeguarding Advisor post beyond October 2017, Mr Paul Sharples advised that he would feed back any further information as it became available.

#### **The Forum agreed:**

To change to the wording of the section entitled 'contribution to combined budgets' to include the words '(children's centres)' within the Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Monitoring Report for all future meetings.

### 7 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2016/2017

Mr Mark Golden, Finance Manager, reported on the budget position of the Dedicated Schools Grant for the 2016/2017 Financial Year.

The Forum noted that it was still early in the financial year in terms of reporting as the figures presented only covered the period to 30 April 2016. An increase on the forecasted number of pupils requiring Exceptional Circumstances funding was considered. The Forum also noted an underspend of £49,000 on the speech and language budget that had been identified.

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The Forum noted the report.

### **8 CHILDREN'S CENTRES UPDATE**

The Forum was advised of the ongoing performance of Blackpool Children's Centres before it considered future funding options.

Ms Sara McCartan, Service Manager Children's Centres, reported that Statutory Guidance had put a duty on Local authorities to ensure they had sufficient Children's Centres to meet the needs of young children and parents living in the area, particularly those in greatest need of support. The Forum noted that currently there were nine designated Children's Centres within Blackpool, two of which were directly managed by the Local Authority (Grange Park and Talbot and Brunswick). For the remaining seven Children's Centres, the Local Authority commissioned Schools or Academies (Baines, Claremont, Kincaig, Mereside, St Cuthberts, Thames and Revoe).

The Forum was advised of a consultation on the future of Children's Centres due to take place in Summer 2016. Ms McCartan reported that the DfE agreed with Ofsted to pause the Children's Centre inspection cycle, pending the outcome of the consultation, meaning that any Children's Centre inspections due in the 2015/2016 academic year under sections 2, 3 and 4 of the Children's Centre Regulations 2010 would not take place until after the conclusion of the consultation. Children's Centres were expected to continue their work as usual during this period, including collection and monitoring of data in preparation for inspection.

In terms of performance, the Forum noted that prior to the Ofsted pause, a total of 89% of Blackpool Children's Centres had been graded as 'Outstanding' or 'Good' as compared to 67% in the North West and 66% in England (as of 31<sup>st</sup> August 2015). Ms McCartan advised that one Children's Centre in Blackpool had been graded as 'Requires Improvement', which equated to 11% within Blackpool compared to 32% in the North West and 33% in England. In addition, there were no 'Inadequate' grades in Blackpool compared to 2% overall in England.

Ms McCartan advised that the Blackpool Children's Centre Outcomes Framework had been introduced in 2015 and Children's Centre Leaders, in conjunction with their Advisory Board, set targets based on specific groups and a suite of 21 outcomes. It was noted that findings from 2015/2016 demonstrated that progress had been made against over 92% of the outcomes set. Ms McCartan added that the Children's Centre outcomes for 2016/2017 would focus on specific target groups such as children on statutory plans, children who lived in low income households and children living with domestic abuse.

The Forum noted a number of Children's Centre successes in 2015/2016 that included the new Outcomes Framework which had been trialled and subsequent learning shared with access rates for target groups increased as a result. Also, the Forum was informed that centres were now able to better evidence progress towards and achievement of outcomes.

Ms McCartan reported that the business case to maintain the contribution to combined budgets for Blackpool's Children's Centres had been submitted to the Department for

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Education and the authority was awaiting feedback. Members noted that other authorities were in a similar position and would have to wait to hear the result of the consultation to provide some direction in the future.

Following a discussion about possible alternatives to Children's Centres and their viability, it was agreed that in the short term increased uptake and joint working with GP's and the Clinical Commissioning Group would help. Ultimately members agreed that there was a moral obligation to maintain Children's Centres despite uncertainty over future arrangements and potential cuts to funding.

### **The Forum agreed:**

To provide continued support to Blackpool Children's Centres through the contribution to combined budgets, subject to the outcome of the business case on historic commitments submitted to the Department for Education.

### **9 OUT OF BOROUGH PLACEMENTS**

Dr Simon Jenner, Principal Educational Psychologist/Service Manager Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, presented his report.

The Forum was advised that the use of out of borough special schools (independent and other Local Authority) had steadily increased the pressures placed on the high needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant budget. Dr Jenner added that currently there was no dedicated Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) provision within the borough. He added that the increase was due to greater numbers being identified with SEMH needs and requiring specialist provision. The total cost for all out of borough provision in 2015/2016 was £1,391,106.

Dr Jenner advised that the only way of setting up new provision currently was via a Free School. He added that the Special Educational Needs (SEN) team had discussed that option with one of the independent school groups currently used and negotiations were ongoing to that end. In addition, the Forum was advised that further discussions were underway with out of borough providers to try and negotiate reduced rates for placements on a bulk basis. Dr Jenner informed members that one of the difficulties with any alternative option was the need for provision to be on a case by case basis given the disparities between levels of need. In terms of cost, Dr Jenner reported that per placement costs stood at between £35,000 and £40,000 depending on the level of need.

In response to a question regarding plans if all current options failed to resolve the issue with provision, Dr Jenner advised that the only option would be to approach potential providers again in a bid to generate interest.

### **The Forum agreed:**

1. That the Council continue to explore the most cost effective options in regard to negotiating the cost of placements.

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2. That exploration continue around options to set up independent Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) provision within Blackpool in order to cater for the needs of some of the students identified with SEMH in a more cost effective way.

### **10 SPECIAL SCHOOL BANDING REVIEW**

Mr Paul Sharples, School Funding and PFI Manager presented the report and sought approval to revise Blackpool's banding methodology for the funding of special school pupils.

Mr Sharples stated that the banding system currently in use in Blackpool had not been deemed fit for purpose in meeting the diverse range of needs. He advised that currently there were five bands in primary, and five bands in secondary which were linked to the primary need of the pupil so, for example, two pupils at different points on the autistic spectrum would be placed in the same band and receive the same level of funding. He added that The Council's Special Educational Needs (SEN) and finance teams, along with the head teachers of the three special schools, had reviewed a number of alternative methodologies used by other local authorities. Following that review, it was agreed that the preferred methodology was that developed by Blackburn with Darwen Council, which assessed the level of need of pupils across four different domains in order to determine the level of funding. This had the major benefit of allowing the complexity of need to be fairly reflected in funding levels.

The Forum was shown a table that detailed funding levels by school under the current and the proposed banding systems. Mr Sharples reported that the overall variance of £45,000 was shown in the table, since the Schools Forum had approved the allocation of this amount of one-off funding in 2016/2017 to pay for the protection required to Highfurlong's budget as a result of the minimum funding guarantee. He added that a further minor change to the funding system in Blackpool was proposed with respect to the lump sum fixed costs faced by schools. Mr Sharples advised that in short, the proposed funding change would mean; £10,000 per place commissioned, £165,000 lump sum per school (as in the mainstream formula for 2016/2017), a £5,000 lump sum for schools with hydrotherapy facilities and top-up funding for each pupil in accordance with the new banding system.

Mr Cole Andrew, Headteacher, Woodlands Special School, spoke in support of the proposals and added that there were a number of benefits that included a more simplified and user friendly model, a morally better system and the potential to adapt the same model for use in mainstream schools at a future date.

#### **The Forum agreed:**

To approve the introduction of the banding methodology for the funding of special school pupils outlined in the report, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016.

### **11 ACADEMY UPDATE**

Ms Amanda Whitehead, Head Universal Services and School Effectiveness, advised that the only real development in terms of Academies had been the conversion of Highfield

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Humanities College on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016. She added that the school was now known as Highfield Leadership Academy.

The Forum noted the update.

### **12 LOCAL AUTHORITY UPDATE**

Ms Amanda Whitehead, Head Universal Services and School Effectiveness, reported on the outcome of the School Improvement Review.

The Forum was advised that a consultation document had been issued outlining proposals for the structure and functions of the Council's School improvement service and had received responses from 25<sup>th</sup> April until 06<sup>th</sup> May, 2016. On 6<sup>th</sup> May 2016 the Government advised that it would not be necessary to bring about blanket legislation to convert all schools to academies. However, the government continues to require underperforming schools to convert to academy status where they would benefit from the support of a strong sponsor. Ms Whitehead advised that as such, the authority still considered it appropriate to implement the proposed review in view of the number of schools that had already transitioned to academy status and the continuing national agenda.

Ms Whitehead informed the Forum that the Council would be appointing a School Intervention Advisor to work across Primary, Secondary and Special Schools and the post would involve support for schools to transition to academy status where such support would be required or would be appropriate in accordance with national policies. In addition, The Forum noted that the Council's responsibilities for statutory assessment and moderation would remain and it would continue to work with staff and schools to implement an appropriate service model for the future. Ms Whitehead informed members that the Council would also continue to support the local Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education with the Schools Support Officer providing administrative support for meetings and acting as the first point of contact.

Following a discussion, concerns were raised at whether the Regional Schools Commissioner had agreed to the changes in principle. Ms Whitehead advised that she had and in addition, despite the Council not receiving any formal responses from schools or Governors during the consultation period, there would still be a meeting on 14 July 2016 to allow Headteachers and Governors an opportunity to hear the rationale behind the changes to School Improvement and to provide context within the national picture.

Ms Whitehead reported that the Terms of Reference for the Early Years Steering Group would be reviewed.

The Forum also discussed the feasibility of attendance of a representative from the Council's Public Health department at future meetings and agreed that it was desirable.

### **The Forum agreed:**

To invite a representative from the Council's Public Health department to attend future meetings.

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### 13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the date of the next meeting would be Tuesday 11 October 2016.

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**Chairman**

(The meeting ended at 11.45 am)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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