

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 14 MARCH 2017

Present:

Primary School Head Teachers/Representatives

Ms J Hirst, Bispham Endowed (Chairman)

Ms Elaine Allen, St John Vianney

Special School Head Teacher/Head Teacher Representative

Mr C Andrew, Woodlands

Academy School Representatives

Ms J Carroll, Roseacre

Mr M Gray, Waterloo

Ms T Harrison, Thames

Mr D Medcalf, St Georges

Mr N Toyne, Devonshire

Mrs S Wilson, Fylde Coast Academy Trust

Non-Schools Members

Ms A Baines, Staff/Teacher Associations

Ms W Casson, Pupil Referral Unit

Ms C Butterworth, Primary School Governor

Mr D Dickinson, Staff/Teacher Associations

Mr R Rendell, Early Years Strategic Group

In Attendance:

Councillor Kathryn Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning

Mrs D Taylor, Lead Nurse/Public Health Practitioner

Mr M Golden, Finance Manager

Mrs A Whitehead, Head of Schools, Standards and Effectiveness

Mr C Williams, Democratic Governance Adviser (Minutes)

Mr K Wood, Divisional Commissioning Manager

Mrs H Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources.

Mrs A Smith, Finance Officer, Westcliff Primary School

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Simon Brennand and Graeme Dow, Academy School Representatives, and Paul Sharples, School Funding and PFI Manager.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 10 JANUARY 2017

The minutes of the Schools Forum held on 10 January 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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Page 2, Minute 11: It was reported that the consultation related to the free school on the former Arnold School site had closed and all responses received.

4 COMMISSIONING REVIEWS

Mr Kim Wood, Divisional Commissioning Manager, reported on a number of commissioning reviews undertaken by the Local Authority in relation to home to school transport, Early Years' service provision and Speech and Language Therapy.

It was reported that following similar moves by other Authorities with regard to transport provided to faith schools, it had been proposed that the four buses currently partly funded by the Council to take children to and from St Mary's Catholic Academy, no longer receive an Authority contribution. Concerns were noted that there might be an impact on standards and attainment at St Marys should the decision be taken to remove funding for the bus services. Further savings related to coach services for Park School were also discussed. Forum members agreed in principal that encouraging greater independent travel for those that were able, should be encouraged.

In terms of Early Years Services, it was reported that an external consultant had reviewed the current Local Authority offer with a view to highlighting potential areas for savings to be made given the reduction for Early Years Central Expenditure that would mean total funds of approximately £496,000 in 2017/2018 versus £940,000 in 2016/2017. Ideas such as offering training on a buy-in basis were discussed.

Speech and Language services had been reviewed and a number of important elements of the review were discussed. It was reported that complaints about the quality of NHS Trust provision had been received and that the Clinical Commissioning Group and Local Authority had not always been able to reach agreement on the best services to be commissioned. Improved links with the CCG were agreed as desirable to improve future commissioning practice, increase integration and avoid duplication. The Forum was advised that re-commissioning of some of the most important services such as the Outreach Team would continue and be supported by additional funding from Betterstart and elsewhere.

Mr Wood advised that Special Educational Needs and Disability services were also currently under review and further updates would be provided once the process had been completed.

Overall, the Forum noted that expectations about the nature of future Service Level Agreements (SLA's) would have to be adjusted given the financial pressures on the Local Authority. Concerns were expressed about whether the Authority could continue to meet the needs of a diverse range of customers and whether the reduction to services would have a detrimental impact on standards. A suggestion to contact the Northern Powerhouse to enquire about the possibility of future additional funding to help mitigate any shortfall in SLA's was agreed as a worthwhile pursuit.

The Forum agreed:

Mrs Hilary Wood/Mr Kim Wood to provide an update on the findings of the Local Authority review of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities provision once completed.

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5 PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

Mrs Donna Taylor presented the Public Health update.

Forum members were informed of a number of initiatives that had been designed to help school age children. It was reported that the Healthy Weight Summit, held on 2 February 2017 at the Winter Gardens, had been well attended by partners from the Police, Hospital Trust, Clinical Commissioning Group and others. A follow-up session planned for 28 June 2017 was noted and an invitation was extended to all members of the Forum.

The Give Up Loving Pop (GULP) campaign was designed to reduce children's intake of sugary drinks and Mrs Taylor advised that it would run from 10 March until 31 March 2017.

It was reported that the school milk fluoridation scheme had been largely successful and current uptake in Blackpool Schools was 78%. In addition, milk fluoridation was due to be discussed as part of an item on Oral Health at the next Health Scrutiny meeting.

In relation to the free school breakfast scheme, overall feedback had been positive with benefits of increased concentration and engagement among school children noted and increased consumption of fruit, vegetables, milk and yoghurt. These sentiments were echoed by the post-16 representative who suggested that performance of students appeared to improve especially around exam times when the uptake of free breakfasts was highest and as such, the cost was far outweighed by the benefits. Following a question about the possibility of links between children having multiple breakfasts and childhood obesity, Mrs Taylor advised that actually the opposite was more likely to be the case, namely that children who regularly skipped breakfast were more likely to snack and have larger meals at other times of the day, which contributed more significantly to childhood obesity. The general consensus was that Betterstart and the revised Health Visitor model would play a key role in informing parents about the importance of their children's diet.

Concerns were expressed at some of the content of the School Health Education Unit (SHEU) questionnaire, in particular the nature of certain questions and whether they were age appropriate in some cases.

The Forum agreed:

Mrs Taylor to discuss certain aspects of the content of the School Health Education Unit at the next Public Health Working Party meeting and feedback at the next Forum meeting.

6 SCHOOLS FORUM RESPONSE TO SCHOOLS NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION

Mrs Wood presented the report and advised on the key elements of the Forum response to the Schools National Funding Formula Consultation.

It was noted that the draft response largely focused on two areas; the principle of fairness and the balance of deprivation. In relation to the former, Mrs Wood advised that the

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DfE's proposals had included the suggestion that no school would lose more than three per cent overall compared to existing funding. However, this had gone against the Government's own stated intention of removing the inequities that exist in the current system between schools with similar characteristics in different parts of the country.

The balance of deprivation funding had been allocated using Free School Meals (FSM) data and the IDACI indicator. Forum noted that the consultation document recognised that the use of IDACI supports all those whose background may create a barrier to their education, not only those with a history of free school meal eligibility. In relation to the latest proposals for 5.5 per cent of funding to be allocated through FSM data, and only 3.9 per cent through IDACI; if the weighting for IDACI was increased, this would benefit Blackpool, as a large number of pupils are within the most deprived IDACI bands relative to the rest of the country.

The Forum agreed:

1. To approve the draft consultation response for submission on the Forum's behalf.
2. Mrs Wood to circulate the response to Schools for information.

7 SCHOOLS FORUM RESPONSE TO HIGH NEEDS FUNDING REFORM CONSULTATION

Mrs Wood presented the report and advised on the key elements of the Forum response to the High Needs Funding Formula Consultation.

It was noted that the draft response was in many ways similar to that compiled in relation to the Schools National Funding Formula and focused on area cost adjustments and IDACI banding. In relation to the former, concerns with the scale to which the Area Cost Adjustments had been applied in the formula were having the effect of negating relative need in local authorities with low multipliers. It was suggested that in poor areas, the General Labour Market would be skewed by low-paid employment, and not indicative of the better paid salaries in schools.

The Forum agreed:

1. To approve the draft consultation response for submission on the Forum's behalf.
2. Mrs Wood to circulate the response to Schools for information.

8 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2016/2017

Mr Mark Golden presented the report detailing the current budget position of the Dedicated Schools Grant for the 2016/2017 Financial Year and the amount of Dedicated Schools Grant reserves as at 31 January 2017 along with details of future commitments.

The main pressures on the DSG for 2016/2017 within the High Needs Block continued to be the number and cost of Out of Borough Placements and the amount of top-up funding for Mainstream schools. Despite a level of underspend within the early years block related to central services savings, there would be a total in-year overspend of £296,000. This was largely attributed to the costs associated with additional out of borough placements and related transport. However, it was noted that in theory, should the development of a free special school receive the go ahead, it could go some way to

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alleviating some of those costs and help to reduce the overall number of out of borough placements. It was reported that a £57,000 grant had been made available to the Local Authority to carry out a strategic review of High Needs Provision.

Concerns were noted about possible over-reliance on measures like the introduction of a free-school to relieve some of the pressures on the Pupil Referral Unit

Forum members were advised that the DSG Reserves figure of £1,556,680 did not incorporate the additional amount of the £296,000 in year overspend.

The Forum noted the report.

9 PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT FINANCES 2016/2017

Mrs Wood introduced the item and outlined some of the issues that were currently being faced by the Pupil Referral Unit.

Approximately 310 pupils were currently on roll with concerns that there could be a further ten by the end of March 2017. In addition to the numbers of pupils, concerns about staffing levels, staff sickness and high usage of supply teachers were expressed by Mrs Casson. There were also worries that the unit could return a deficit at year-end.

The Forum discussed the issues faced by the Pupil Referral Unit and agreed that simply agreeing to the recommendations contained within the report would be insufficient to deal with what was in effect, a system wide problem. Furthermore, some members agreed that there was a moral obligation to try and reverse the trend for high numbers of children entering the PRU as it had become unsustainable. The general consensus was that this could only be achieved by changing attitudes, by reducing the number of permanent exclusions from schools and minimising numbers of elected home educated children. It was accepted that for some of these reasons, a number of mainstream settings were currently unable to meet the needs of some of their children. Given the issues discussed in relation to the PRU, it was suggested that in future, schools could decide to create their own provision for those children most difficult to educate within a traditional setting.

In year fair access was discussed and the likelihood of funding becoming more difficult to obtain in the future. Additional factors, such as Pupil Premium funding not following some children when they entered the PRU, had compounded the situation. Forum members agreed that a formal review of provision within the PRU was required and recommendations needed in relation to exclusion and elective home education protocols.

The Forum agreed:

1. That a one-off payment is made to Educational Diversity to account for the average number of pupils in the school in excess of the commissioned places in 2016/2017 with the actual figure to reflect the actual year end average figure.
2. To rectify the 2016/2017 income target for the Pupil Referral Unit based on actual income received.
3. To determine that, if the period of time on the Elective Home Education register is less than one academic year, the previous school can be charged if the pupil then goes onto the roll of the Pupil Referral Unit. All schools to be formally notified.

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4. To recommend further debate by the School Improvement Board on whether more could be done to incentivise mainstream schools to support pupils in order to avoid the need for admission into the PRU and whether more support could be offered to the PRU.
5. To discuss concerns about the status of the Pupil Referral Unit with the Regional Schools Commissioner.
6. That a standing item be brought to future Forum meetings on Inclusion and the Pupil Referral Unit to monitor progress.

10 EARLY YEARS FUNDING FORMULA 2017/2018

Mrs Wood outlined the purpose of the report to make a decision in relation to the Local Authority's proposed formula for three- and four-year old early education, and to note the proposed funding rate for two-year olds. She added that the proposed formula was based on new arrangements set out by the Department for Education (DfE) and followed a period of consultation with providers.

The Forum noted a summary of the proposals which included recommendations to: introduce a single base rate of £3.90 for all providers from 2017/2018, to retain the deprivation supplement, using the same methodology as in the current formula, to introduce a quality supplement with two elements, to not have additional supplements for flexibility or for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and to create an Early Years Inclusion Fund of £25,000 designed to support the Local Authority to work with providers to address the needs of individual children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

A discussion took place about the re-allocation of funding between local authorities and the likely result in a reduction of funding as a whole for Blackpool. It was reported that the Government had stated that, from April 2017, it wanted funding for things such as development support and training to be distributed to providers, in order that they decide how to use the funding to best meet the needs of their business. This would mean a significant reduction in the amount that the Council would have available to provide Early Years support and training that it previously provided to settings free at the point of access.

Mrs Wood advised that a review of services was currently underway to identify how the Council could reduce its expenditure by more than £400,000, and providers would be notified of the outcome of the review in due course.

The Forum agreed:

1. To agree to the Local Authority's proposed formula for three and four-year old early education for 2017/2018.
2. To note the Local Authority's proposed funding rate for two-year olds at £5.00 per hour from April 2017.

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11 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2017/2018

Forum members noted the details of the announcement of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding to the authority and considered the Local Authority's proposals for its allocation.

Some of the key points of the report were noted that included; the underlying Schools Block would be kept at flat cash per pupil for 2017/2018 and the Schools Block unit of funding had decreased from £4,534.18 to £4,493.13 per pupil as a result of a baselining exercise carried out by the Education Funding Agency (EFA). Also, from April 2017, the retained element of the Education Services Grant (ESG) of £282,000 would be transferred into the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

In the High Needs Block allocation, it was reported that additional funding of £129.9 million had been made available nationally in 2017/2018 for growth in population with Blackpool's share of this allocation amounting to £231,000. Also within the High Needs Block, there was a technical adjustment with respect to the element 2 (£6,000) place funding for post-16 education. This was previously funded from the Department for Education's post-16 budget, but would be transferred to feature as part of DSG from April 2017. The Forum noted that the adjustment equated to £654,000 for Blackpool.

With respect to the Early Years Block, there were a number of adjustments to note, namely; the national formula for 3 and 4-year old education had resulted in a decrease in the allocation to Blackpool of £137,000 in respect of the 15-hour entitlement. Also, an additional amount of £920,000 had been included in DSG with regard to the new entitlement to 30 hours of childcare for eligible working parents. Further changes related to the Early Years Block included; a slight decrease in the Early Years Pupil Premium allocation based on actual numbers of £7,000 and the addition to DSG of the new Disability Access Fund for 3 and 4-year olds of £37,000 to be allocated to settings as a one-off payment for children in their setting who were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance. Also, the revised allocation for 2-year old funding would result in an increase of £89,000 in 2017/2018.

It was noted that based upon an earlier decision at Item 9 to offer additional financial support to the Pupil Referral Unit, the Reserves figure presented in the report would change as a result, though the overall level of reserves remained healthy and manageable.

Mrs Wood highlighted the fact that the contribution to the combined budgets of £1million that had previously been agreed by the Forum to support the school-based Children's Centres would continue to be funded through DSG for the time being. However, the Department for Education had stated that it expected such historic commitments to be unwound over time. Schools Forum agreed to continue to support the school-based Children's Centres while this funding remained available.

The Forum agreed:

1. To approve the proposed Dedicated Schools Grant budget for 2017/2018.
2. To adjust the in-year deficit based on the additional money agreed to be allocated to the PRU (Item 9, action 1)

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12 ACADEMY UPDATE

Mrs Amanda Whitehead, Head of Schools, Standards and Effectiveness, provided a verbal update to the Forum.

She reported that Stanley Primary School intended to join the Mulberry Multi Academy Trust with Norbreck Primary Academy as the lead school.

A recent HMI Inspection at South Shore Academy had been largely positive and it was hoped that the school would continue to improve to the point where it could once again become part of the Ofsted inspection cycle. Another recent inspection at St Georges Academy had resulted in certain elements of its provision being deemed to require improvement whilst Holy Family Catholic Primary School had received a good overall rating following its full inspection.

The Forum noted the update.

13 LOCAL AUTHORITY UPDATE

In terms of Local Authority updates, it was reported that Ms Gani Martins had appointed as the Interim Director of Children's Services until Ms Diane Booth occupied the permanent position in April 2017. In addition, Forum members were advised that Dr Simon Jenner had left the Authority and the position of Service Manager Special Educational Needs and Disabilities would be filled on an interim basis by Mr Phil Thompson.

Following a meeting with Ofsted representatives to discuss education provision within the Local Authority area, a number of points had been raised in relation to Inclusion and evidence of a school-led system. Mrs Whitehead advised that through the School Improvement Board and its various Sub-Groups, discussions were ongoing on how schools could take a more active role in measures designed to improve inclusion and access.

Mrs Whitehead welcomed responses to the Commissioning Reviews discussed at Item 4 on the agenda and in relation to the work of the Pupil Welfare Service.

The Forum noted the update.

14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the date of the next meeting would be Tuesday 20 June 2017.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 12.26 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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