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MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 10 MARCH 2020

Present:

Primary School Head Teachers/Representative

Ms J Hirst, Bispham Endowed
Dr E Allen, St John Vianney

Special School Maintained Representative

Ms K Haworth, Woodlands

Special School Academy Representative

Ms S Fielder, Chair of Governors, Park Community Academy

Academy School Representatives

Ms A Bailey, Highfield (Star Academies)
Mr S Brennand, Unity
Mr R Farley, Westminster
Ms T Harrison, Thames
Ms J Heywood, Revoe
Mr D Medcalf, St Georges
Mr E Vitalis, Marton / South Shore (Bright Futures)

Pupil Referral Unit

Ms W Casson, Educational Diversity

Non-Schools Members

Mr N Adams, Staff / Teacher Associations
Ms A Baines, Staff/Teacher Associations
Mr S Hughes, Blackpool and the Fylde College
Mr R Rendell, Early Years Strategic Group

In Attendance:

Councillor K Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools, Education and Aspiration

Ms N Dennison, Public Health Specialist
Mr D Maddocks, Senior Accountant (for Mr M Golden)
Mr P Sharples, School Funding and Private Finance Initiative Manager
Mr P Thompson, Head of SEND
Mr P Turner, Head of Service for School Standards, Safeguarding and Inclusion
Mrs H Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources
Mrs D Bowater, Democratic Governance Adviser (minutes)

Ms L Franey, Head of Delivery, Blackpool and Oldham Opportunity Area, Department for Education (Item 6)
Ms H O'Neill, St Mary's Catholic College, Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi Academy Trust (BEBCMAT) (observing items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8)

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1 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Introductions were made and apologies for absence were received from Michelle Lonican, Our Lady of the Assumption and Dean Logan, Roseacre (Achievement Through Collaboration). It was recognised that Darren Maddocks was in attendance in place of Mark Golden and Helen O'Neill was observing the meeting. It was noted that Liz Franey from the Department for Education would attend for item 6 of the agenda to provide an update on the Continuum of Provision.

It was reported that Paul Sharples would be leaving his role at Blackpool Council and the Forum recorded their thanks to him for his support and wished him every success in his future role.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were noted.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Schools Forum held on 14 January 2020 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting pending the correction of the spelling of Derek Medcalf and the reference to Dr Elaine Allen in the attendance section.

Matters arising from the minutes were noted:

Item 3: Election of Chairman - it was noted that the election of the Chairman of the Schools Forum would be until July 2020 rather than January 2021 due to the retirement of Jo Hirst.

Item 5: Minutes of the October 2019 meeting, Children's Centre update – Hilary Wood confirmed that the process had concluded and the costs had been collated. The total cost was approximately £297k, an overspend of £47k on the available budget for 2019/20.

Item 5: Minutes of the October 2019 meeting, Illuminate Funding – in some cases certain barriers had been experienced with the process of applying for and receiving the Illuminate funding. It was agreed that Hilary Wood would discuss the issue with Paul Bainbridge.

Item 5: Minutes of the October 2019 meeting, Risk Protection Arrangements – it was reported that the risk protection insurance available to academies would be extended to maintained settings. As the Council's current insurance contract was entering the second year of a three-year arrangement, maintained schools would be contacted in the new financial year in respect of future options.

Item 12: De-delegation of services and retention of funding for education functions 2020/21 – the balance relating to the fund for union duties would be available at the next meeting following the year-end closedown.

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Resolved:

- **Hilary Wood to discuss the process of applying and receiving the Illuminate Funding with Paul Bainbridge.**
- **Hilary Wood to present the balance relating to the fund for union duties to the forum at the next meeting.**

4 PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

Nicky Dennison, Specialist in Public Health provided the update report. It was reported that the Free School Breakfast scheme funded by Public Health would be reviewed in conjunction with the school food plan and more healthy eating options. A consultation with schools would be undertaken to evaluate the current process and ways to improve the system; followed by a consultation with parents. In response to a question, it was noted that there was no central funding for the breakfast scheme and it was solely funded by Public Health. It was reported that some funding from the Sunday Times Charity Appeal had been received to address holiday hunger and the results of a bid for funding from the Department of Education for summer activities was awaited.

Colleagues were asked to note that there was a Bystander Stakeholder event on 19 March 2020 following the recent pilot in Blackpool. It was also noted that Very Brief Advice Training for Tobacco Dependence was available for school and college staff.

In response to a question as to whether tobacco advice was available for parents as raised at a previous forum, it was noted that no further updates were available.

Following a question relating to free period products available in schools including primary and special schools, Nicky Dennison agreed to check whether they were widely available.

It was agreed that the Public Health update report would be circulated to all headteachers for information.

Resolved:

- **To circulate the Public Health update report to headteachers for information.**

5 LOCAL AUTHORITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE

Paul Turner, Head of Service for School Standards, Safeguarding and Inclusion provided the update report. Schools Forum members were asked to agree to the advertisement for the School Safeguarding Adviser role on a fixed term contract. It was outlined that the role would focus more on early help and supporting schools as well as providing ongoing school focussed training. Jeremy Mannino would continue to respond to school safeguarding concerns and investigating complaints. The fixed term role would be on a reduced salary scale and the difference between the salary and that of the School Safeguarding Adviser would be returned to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

In response to a query, it was noted that the post was temporary rather than permanent

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due to Jeremy Mannino assuming the role of Head of Virtual School on a fixed term basis. It was also noted that the role would be advertised on a local government salary scale but that this would not restrict applications for education staff.

Following consideration, Schools Forum agreed to the proposal to advertise to fill the School Safeguarding Adviser role on a fixed term contract as outlined.

Paul Turner provided further updates from the Local Authority and it was noted that St Nicholas School had received a Section 8 Ofsted visit. In relation to academies, Highfield Academy had received an Ofsted monitoring visit.

It was reported that the Local Authority had been selected again for a visit from the Standards and Testing Agency to look at the effectiveness of moderation arrangements.

The Inclusion data was considered and the picture for 2019-20 was largely similar to 2018-19. A significant number of absences were recorded due to the Norovirus and winter vomiting bug from both pupils and teachers.

In addition, it was reported that Century Tech could provide a free training offer to schools in the event of school closures due to Coronavirus and Paul Turner would circulate the relevant information to schools.

It was also reported that the pupil welfare service offered to maintained schools would gradually increase to become aligned with the service level agreement offered to academies. An anticipated 10% increase in costs was expected. In response to a question, it was noted that there would also be an increase per pupil for the cost of the off-site school visits system, Evolve.

Finally, Paul Turner confirmed that the Local Authority could no longer subsidise the Children's University; schools were welcome to administer the scheme themselves or in partnership with Blackpool and the Fylde College, but the Local Authority would now be unable to provide the non-statutory initiative at a subsidised rate.

It was agreed to share the Local Authority and Inclusion update report with headteachers for information.

Resolved:

- **Schools Forum agreed to the proposal to advertise to fill the School Safeguarding Adviser role on a fixed term contract.**
- **To share the Local Authority and Inclusion update report with headteachers for information.**

6 CONTINUUM OF PROVISION

(Liz Franey was in attendance for this item only)

Liz Franey, Head of Delivery for Blackpool and Oldham Opportunity Area attended the

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meeting to provide an update on the Continuum of Provision project at the request of the Schools Forum. It was reported that the project supported Priority Two of the Opportunity Area delivery plan to provide support for vulnerable children and families to improve attendance and outcomes and reduce exclusions. It was recognised that continuing high levels of permanent exclusions placed pressure on the Local Authority's alternative provision budget.

The governance arrangements were outlined to show how the project would be monitored and where the information would be considered.

The project progress was reported. It was noted that there were two monitoring meetings each term including the headteacher, project lead and Opportunity Area lead and the first meetings took place in February 2020. Details on the costs were scheduled to be presented at the end of March 2020 and an update would be available for Schools Forum following these meetings.

A question was raised as to why the report suggested that there had been a reduction in the number of Elective Home Education pupils, when other data presented to the Forum showed that numbers were 40 higher than at the same time last year. It was clarified that the rate of increase since the start of this year was lower than over the same period in the previous academic year, so the rate of increase was reducing.

A question was raised whether primary schools could have been included in the pilot, it was acknowledged that secondary schools were targeted as their statistics were significantly higher than national figures. It was acknowledged that there was good practice within primary settings.

In response to a question as to whether there would be funding available elsewhere for a primary project, it was noted that there would not be funding on the scale of the Continuum of Provision project, but a small pilot might be feasible.

Following discussion around devolved budgets, it was acknowledged that Schools Forum could decide whether alternative provision funds should be devolved to schools. It was acknowledged that the alternative provision budget line was set to reduce resulting from the Continuum of Provision Project.

Assurances were sought on value for money and it was asked whether there was any devolution of funding this year. It was noted that the only devolution of funding from the High Needs Block this year was to support the Continuum of Provision project. It was also noted that the project was funded for one year only.

Assurances were sought as to who would quality assure any new provision should the current alternative provision landscape change?

As a positive, it was acknowledged that secondary schools were working towards more inclusive provision as a result of the project.

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Resolved:

- A clear outline of the budget and the options to be determined and discussed at the next meeting.

7 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2019/20

Darren Maddocks, Senior Accountant, provided a report on the budget position of the 2019/20 Dedicated Schools Grant and the amount of Dedicated Schools Grant reserves as at 31 January 2020.

A forecast overspend of £2.501million was reported, an increase of £1.206million due to an increase in mainstream top up funding and an increase in out of area and special school provision. The predicted deficit forecast at March 2020 was £2.918million however the out of borough costs were increasing on a month by month basis.

In response to a question, it was noted that an increase in 'mainstream top up' resulted in a shift in the number of SEND pupils remaining in mainstream settings due to a positive change of culture and ethos to meet the needs of pupils in mainstream settings. A child without an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) but with additional needs could also now access mainstream top up funding.

In response to a further question, it was noted that new to area pupils were increasing the demands on the budget. It was noted that where pupils moved to the area and had high needs, this could not be predicted. It was also noted that there was no additional financial help from the government in these instances; the amount provided per high needs child of £4k did not cover placement costs. It was recognised that the government were launching a high needs review therefore robust data was required to illustrate the picture in Blackpool schools.

The report was noted.

8 HIGH NEEDS UPDATE

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources provided an overview of the latest developments relevant to the High Needs Budget. As with other areas, Blackpool was experiencing financial pressures on its High Needs Budget. A medium term financial plan had been developed to monitor forecast expenditure against its High Needs Budget and factor in predictions of where savings may be achievable.

Despite the additional government funding, pupil numbers in Special Schools and Out of Borough placements continued their upward trend, leading to a position where costs exceeded funding allocations by more than £1m per year. It was assumed that the deficit against the Dedicated Schools Grant would reach over £4million by the end of 2020/21 rising to almost £9m by the end of 2024/25.

Efficiencies were being identified to address the overspend, looking at key areas of Special School provision, use of SERFs and tackling out of Borough placements.

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Expressions of interest had been requested from mainstream settings where they could accommodate provision for pupils with special education needs and disabilities reducing the expense of out of borough provision.

From comments, it was noted that secondary schools did want to support the initiative however there was a struggle with space in school buildings. A consultation on the use of SERFs would be undertaken between March 2020 and May 2020 to determine how they could be utilised. It was noted that the High Needs Funding Working Group could be used to feed back outcomes.

Following discussion, it was noted that the Local Authority would consult on all options to provide savings, resulting in an options paper outlining the savings and risk of using each option.

It was recognised that schools should encourage parents to choose a school placement for their child based on meeting their specific needs and not actively promote one school or deter from another. It was requested that headteachers worked together to encourage this message. It was also requested that the Local Authority issue robust messages to school settings on this subject.

Finally, it was noted that there would be two independent meetings facilitated by the Isos Partnership in March and May 2020 to discuss placements and headteachers and Chairs of Governors would be invited.

Hilary Wood reported that the forecast deficit at 31 March 2020 was more than 2% of the Dedicated Schools Grant allocation but the Department for Education (DfE) had revised its processes around deficit recovery therefore it was unclear whether Blackpool would be invited to provide the DfE with a deficit recovery plan.

In response to a question, it was noted that the timescales for consultation for next year's schools national funding formula had not been determined however there would be a two stage consultation.

(Councillor Benson, Roger Farley, Neil Adams, Simon Hughes and Simon Brennand left the meeting)

9 EARLY YEARS FUNDING FORMULA 2020/21

Paul Sharples, School Funding and Private Finance Initiative Manager provided the update report. Schools Forum was asked to agree the local authority's proposed formula for Early Years funding for three and four year olds early education for 2020/21, as well as the value of the Inclusion Fund for 2020/21 and note the funding rate for two year olds of £5.09 per hour.

It was commented that there had been a closure of five settings within the town which could result in a reduction of early year's provision. It was also commented that the increase

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in staff wages had not been acknowledged in the increase. Hilary Wood reported that the rates had increased by 1.84%, which was less than the increase in the National Minimum Wage rate. The Department for Education had been made aware of the situation and agreed to raise the issue with the Treasury.

Following discussion, the voting school and Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) members agreed to the recommendations.

Resolved:

- **To agree the local authority's proposed formula for Early Years funding for three and four year olds early education for 2020/21, as well as the value of the Inclusion Fund to raise from £10k (2019/20) to £30k (2020/21) and note the funding rate for two year olds of £5.09 per hour.**

10 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET PROPOSAL 2020/21

Hilary Wood provided the update report to outline the proposals for the use of the Dedicated School Grant in 2020/21. Schools Forum was asked to agree to the proposal for future use of the DSG.

It was acknowledged that the provisional estimates outlined in January 2020 had been updated and presented.

The surplus funding from the Schools Block of £101k would be transferred to the High Needs Block to help offset ongoing pressures as agreed at the January 2020 Schools Forum meeting. Additionally, the surplus of £8k from the Central Schools Block was proposed to be transferred to the High Needs Block.

The High Needs Block spend was predicted at £23.617m against an allocation of £22.276m. The pressure of £1.34m would be partially offset from other blocks and result in an overspend of £1.232m.

Finally, on the Early Years Block, the allocation of £8.733m was shown as a breakeven position. The increase of 1.84% in funding from central government equated to 8 pence per child per hour in the provider rate. A review of local authority expenditure for early years had identified £44k savings to help to increase provider rates by 1pence per child per hour as well as increasing the Early Years Inclusion Fund from £10k to £30k.

Following a vote, Schools Forum agreed to the future use of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) as outlined in the report.

Resolved

- **To agree the proposal for the future use of the DSG as outlined in the report.**

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11 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Forum noted the date of the next meeting as Tuesday 16 June 2020 at 9.15am, @thegrange, Bathurst Avenue, Blackpool, FY3 7RW.

Chairman

(The meeting ended 12.16)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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