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MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 15 MARCH 2022

Present:

Maintained Primary School Head Teachers/Representative
Ms H Moreton, Holy Family

Primary Governor

Ms M Lonican, Our Lady

Special School Maintained Representative

Mr N Oldham, Highfurlong

Special School Academy Representative

Ms G Hughes, Park (Sea View)

Academy / Free School Representatives

Mr S Eccles, St Mary's (BEBMAT)
Mr R Farley, Westminster (FCAT) (Chair)
Ms T Harrison, Thames / Roseacre (AtC)
Mr M McIver, St George's/Baines Endowed (Cidari)
Mr E Vitalis, South Shore / Marton (Bright Futures)

Pupil Referral Unit

Ms V O'Farrell, Education Diversity

Early Years

Ms R Dey, Pebbles Day Nursery

Non-Schools Members

Mr N Adams, UNISON
Ms A Baines, Staff/Teacher Associations

In Attendance:

Councillor J Hobson, Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Schools
Mr D Maddocks, Senior Accountant
Mr P Turner, Assistant Director – School Improvement and SEND
Mrs H Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources
Mrs D Bowater, Democratic Governance Adviser (minutes)

1 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Roger Farley welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Elaine Allen (St John Vianney); Graeme Dow (Anchorsolme/Sea View), Abrar Hussain (Highfield/Star), Jill Gray (Blackpool Sixth Form College), Angela Wellings (Interim Head of SEND) and Mark Golden (Head of Accountancy, Deputy S151 Officer).

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2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest noted.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 18 January 2022 were considered and agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising from the minutes:

Discussion on SEND budgets to be scheduled for a Schools Forum meeting in early 2022 –
At the October 2021 Schools Forum meeting it was noted that there were a number of items relating to SEND support including Early Help which were being reviewed and it was agreed that a more detailed overview would be presented to either the January 2022 or March 2022 Schools Forum meeting. At the January 2022 meeting, it was noted that an update relating to Early Help would be presented to the March 2022 meeting. An update was included in the High Needs agenda item at the March 2022 meeting. It was also recognised that a High Needs Working Group meeting had been arranged for 21 March 2022 where further discussions would take place and an update would be presented to the June 2022 Schools Forum meeting.

Paul Turner’s team to monitor college attendance within the town and the potential impact on numbers of young people not in education employment or training (NEET) –
Paul Turner reported that attendance at the Sixth Form College was 87%. A report on attendance would be included in the local authority update at the next Schools Forum meeting.

At the January 2022 meeting, of the Schools Forum members in attendance, the majority did not agree to support the proposed reduction in the budget for Exceptional Circumstances to £100k from 2022/23 – Hilary Wood reported that the budget for Exceptional Circumstances remained at £165k for 2022/23 and had not been reduced to £100k.

The rate per pupil options for the de-delegation of funding for union duties considering use of the reserves – Hilary Wood reported that there would be no increase in the per pupil rate in 2022/23, and that it would remain at the 2021/22 rate of £4.20 per pupil.

Actions:

- **An update from the High Needs Working Group meeting would be presented to the June 2022 Schools Forum meeting to update on Early Help budget plans (Hilary Wood).**
- **A report on college attendance would be included in the local authority update at the next Schools Forum meeting including the impact on numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (Paul Turner).**

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4 LOCAL AUTHORITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE

(Rachel Dey and Tracy Harrison arrived during the item)

Paul Turner provided an update on recent developments from the local authority since the previous meeting. It was noted that inclusion had improved but recognised that elective home education had increased. It was acknowledged that permanent exclusions were at a similar level as the previous year. It was also recognised that schools were doing well to deliver strategies to get young people back into school. The number of pupils at the Pupil Referral Unit was lower compared to previous years.

In relation to inspections, it was reported that both Montgomery and Langdale schools had received Section 5 inspections and the reports were awaited. Blackpool and the Fylde College had been inspected and rated as good and Blackpool Sixth Form College rated as outstanding following inspections. It was further reported that Westminster Primary Academy was also rated as good following an inspection. A further inspection of the local area looking at SEND had been undertaken in March 2022 with the report anticipated in April 2022.

In relation to Education Investment Areas, it was reported that announcements were awaited from central government but it was anticipated that they would be extending the Opportunity Area programme and making further announcements on high needs capital funding. It was agreed that an update would be presented at a future meeting giving further details of Education Investment Areas once the announcements had been received.

It was commented that the Secretary of State would be visiting both Highfurlong School and Aspire Academy on 18 March 2022.

There were no questions following the report.

Action:

- An update would be presented at a future meeting giving further details of Education Investment Areas once the announcements had been received. (Paul Turner)**

5 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2021/22

In the absence of Mark Golden, Darren Maddocks reported on the budget position of the 2021-22 Dedicated Schools Grant and the amount of Dedicated Schools Grant Reserves Forecast as at 31 January 2022 for information.

It was reported that the budget monitoring to January 2022 forecast a £697k overspend against a deficit budget of £325k. Therefore, the total in-year shortfall was estimated at £1.022m.

The major in-year variances included the post-16 placements demand being £305k higher than budgeted; Access and Inclusion of £107k due to increased costs for the Oracle building

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and resilience coaches; Special Schools placement growth of £154k and Exceptional Circumstances costs higher than budgeted at £175k.

In relation to reserves, it was reported that the local authority was able to account for a transfer into DSG reserves of £1.604m from a provision that had been set aside in the current and previous financial years as discussed at the January 2022 Schools Forum meeting. It was noted that when the transferred provision was added to the brought forward deficit of £5.766m and the in-year deficit of £1.022m, the resulting forecast DSG deficit by 31 March 2022 reduced to £5.183m. This excluded the maintained schools reserves (£3.919m) and the specific Union Fees reserve (£44k).

There were no questions following the report.

6 HIGH NEEDS UPDATE

Hilary Wood provided an update on the latest developments in relation to the High Needs budget.

It was reported that Blackpool, along with many other areas around the country, was experiencing financial pressures on its High Needs Budget. In order to better understand Blackpool's financial position, a medium-term financial plan had been developed to monitor forecast expenditure against the High Needs Budget, and factor in predictions of where savings may be achieved.

It was noted that the additional income in 2022/23 and subsequent years, together with the transfer of the provision for new and growing schools, had contributed to a forecast position whereby the cumulative deficit could be recovered within a four-year period by March 2026. It was reported that the Medium-Term Financial Plan contained a number of ambitious assumptions so concerted efforts were required to contain expenditure. Hilary Wood also highlighted the place planning strategy that was in development to look at the placements of young people with High Needs.

Hilary Wood also provided an update on the Department for Education's (DfE) Safety Valve programme. It was reported that the Safety Valve intervention was introduced in 2021/21 to assist those local authorities with the highest percentage Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit. Local authorities were asked to develop substantial plans for reform to their high needs systems and associated spending, with support and challenge from the DfE. The authorities were held to account for their reform and savings via regular reporting to the DfE and received additional funding over time to contribute to their historic deficits depending on delivery of the reforms.

It was reported that Blackpool had been invited to take part in the second round of the safety valve programme of 2022/23, commencing in September 2022. It was acknowledged that the invitation was based on the deficit position as at March 2021, which showed a deficit of 4.4% against DSG levels, rather than more recent forecasts of deficit recovery plans. As further details were expected in spring 2022, the local authority had been asked to prioritise the development of a DSG management plan, using the DfE's standard suite of

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spreadsheets.

It was reported that the High Needs Funding Working Group had been reconvened to meet on 21 March 2022 to discuss Blackpool's approach to the exercise and a full report would be presented to the Schools Forum meeting in June 2022.

It was noted that the associated safety valve funding would assist with the deficit and that the additional scrutiny placed on the budget could have a positive impact on the service for children and young people in Blackpool.

Questions on the safety valve programme were welcomed.

One member asked whether the DfE had issued a framework to provide assurances that the quality of provision would be protected during the safety valve programme and associated plans to avoid an adverse impact. In response, Hilary Wood confirmed that this could be raised with the DfE but from informal discussions with other authorities, the focus had been on the finances. Paul Turner also commented that he would request that the success of the Opportunity Area programme be taken into consideration.

Hilary Wood provided an update on early help interventions to target funding towards initiatives that provided early help to support schools, delivering better outcomes and avoiding costly interventions at a later stage. It was reported that the High Needs Funding Working Group on 21 March 2022 would be asked to consider priorities for schools.

It was reported that £400k per year has been set aside and the Working Group would consider a number of existing initiatives whose temporary funding had been due to end in the short-term, with a view to shaping the local authority's plans for the most effective use of this funding, thereby ensuring that the benefits of these projects did not end when the funding finished. It was noted that proposals would be presented to Schools Forum in June 2022.

Questions on the Early Help interventions were welcomed.

Paul Turner advised that there was a need to address the number of Elective Home Educated (EHE) young people in Blackpool and reported that there was a full-time member of staff and seconded officer working in this area. He asked Schools Forum members to consider whether they would like to ring fence part of the proposed £400k allocation to finance further EHE officers. He suggested that there was a significant number of children on the EHE list and the officers would be recruited to effectively monitor the cohort and encourage the return to mainstream settings benefiting schools' budgets and also any potential safeguarding concerns.

One member asked whether staff could be seconded from other areas to fulfil these roles as the preference would be to use existing resources if reductions were required elsewhere in the High Needs budget.

Darren Maddocks comments that the local authority finance team would advise against new

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commitments while a deficit remained.

It was agreed the Schools Forum would delegate the powers to respond to the local authority on the additional EHE posts to the High Needs Funding Working Group meeting on 21 March 2022 in order that this could be considered alongside other options for use of the inclusion funding.

Actions:

- **It was agreed that an update on proposals for early help interventions to support schools be presented to the June 2022 Schools Forum following discussions at the High Needs Funding Working Group on 21 March 2022.**
- **The High Needs Funding Working Group to be given delegated powers to respond to the local authority on the additional EHE posts on behalf of the Schools Forum.**

Hilary Wood went on to provide an update on the review of special school funding. The outcome of the discussion paper was outlined in the report summarised as follows:

- Additional pupils in excess of commissioned places will be funded in full in the months where the number of pupils exceed 2% above commissioned places.
- All nursery pupils to be funded as if they attend on a full-time basis.
- The banding of pupils will be reviewed where schools believe that they are wrongly banded.
- No further uplift to be applied in 2022/23, given the other changes being made.

Finally, it was reported that the key performance indicators were included and contained a number of financial and non-financial key performance indicators to allow Schools Forum members to understand trends and impact around SEND and inclusion, it was noted that the indicators were the same as those presented to the January 2022 Schools Forum meeting due to the quarterly reporting timescales.

There were no further questions following the update.

7 EARLY YEARS FUNDING FORMULA 2022/23

Hilary Wood presented the early years funding formula 2022/23 for consultation and asked Schools Forum to consider and agree the local authority's proposed formula for Early Years funding for three- and four-year old early education, as well as the value of the Inclusion Fund for 2022/23, and to note the funding rate for two-year olds.

At paragraph 3.3 of the report, it was noted that the amount should read £4.50 not £4.44 for the overall funding rate for three and four year olds in 2021/22.

It was reported that the local authority proposed to pass through the full amount of the government increase to Early Years providers through the single funding formula. It was proposed that the overall hourly Base Rate increased by a total of 18p per child per hour to include the 17p additional funding, together with 1p from savings. This would bring the Base Rate up to £4.36 per hour, compared to £4.18 in 2021/22.

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It was further reported that the Early Years Inclusion Fund was set aside from the three- and four-year old grant in order to support settings to improve early learning and development outcomes for children with additional needs. In light of higher demand for support from the Inclusion Fund in 2021/22, it was proposed for 2022/23 that the value of the fund be increased and apportioned at 4p per hour. This would equate to approximately £60k per annum, compared to the budget of £30k set aside in 2021/22. This would be funded from the savings identified in central expenditure.

It was finally reported that Government funding for eligible two-year olds had increased by 21p to £5.57 per child per hour for 2022/23, from £5.36 for 2021/22. Hilary Wood confirmed that the local authority's intention was to pass through the full amount of the government increase, together with 1p from savings, to Early Years providers and increase the rate to £5.39 in 2022/23 (from £5.17 in 2021/22).

Members including all school and early years members were asked to vote on the proposals.

All school and early years members in attendance, eligible to vote, agreed to the local authority's proposed formula for three- and four-year old early education for 2022/23.

All school and early years members in attendance, eligible to vote, agreed that the Early Years Inclusion fund for three- and four-year olds should be apportioned at a rate of 4p per hour, equating to approximately £60k per annum.

Finally, all members agreed to note the local authority's funding rate for two-year olds of £5.39 per hour.

Resolved:

- **To note that the overall funding rate for three and four year olds funding rates should read £4.50 not £4.44 for the overall funding rate for three and four year olds in 2021/22 in the report.**
- **Following a vote, all school and early years members in attendance, eligible to vote, agreed to the local authority's proposed formula for three- and four-year old early education for 2022/23.**
- **Following a vote, all school and early years members in attendance, eligible to vote, agreed that the Early Years Inclusion fund for three- and four-year olds should be apportioned at a rate of 4p per hour, equating to approximately £60k per annum.**
- **All members agreed to note the local authority's funding rate for two-year olds of £5.39 per hour.**

8 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET PROPOSAL 2022/23

Hilary Wood presented the proposals for the use of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2022/23 for consultation. It was acknowledged that the provisional estimates for expenditure against the Dedicated Schools Grants in 2022/23 presented in January 2022 had been updated.

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In relation to the Schools Block, the allocation was £98.818m. It was noted that, as agreed by Schools Forum in previous meetings, a transfer of 0.5% equating to £494k had been made to the High Needs Block, and the remaining growth contingency of £90k had been added into the Schools Block. The total amount allocated to schools and academies through the local schools formula was noted as £98.414m.

It was reported that schools had received their budget statements in February 2022 and special schools had received theirs in March 2022.

Hilary Wood also reported that a small balance of £6.5k remained following the running of the formula. The amount was the difference between the allocations within DSG for business rates compared to the actual allocation through the local formula. The Department for Education had proposed a change to the treatment of business rates payments, however this would not be introduced in Blackpool in 2022/23. It was anticipated that the balance would either be recovered by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, or be required to fund any in-year adjustments to business rates funded through the formula.

It was reported that the Central Schools Services Block allocation in 2022/23 would be £1.196m, which is made up of £684k of ongoing funding, plus a reduced amount of £512k in respect of the historic contribution to combined budgets.

It was reported that the High Needs Block forecast expenditure in 2022/23 totalled £28.657m. Funding for this was made up of £28.261m from the High Needs Block, £946k from the additional Spending Review allocation, the transfer of £494k from the Schools Block, plus £49k funding for new and growing special free schools. This total of £29.751m resulted in a forecast surplus of £1.093m in this funding block.

In relation to the Early Years, expenditure against the provisional Early Years Block allocation of £8.649m presented a breakeven position. It was reported that the allocations would be updated once the January 2022 and the January 2023 census have been processed.

Questions were welcomed.

It was acknowledged that there would be a strain on school settlement budgets with the potential 3% pay increase for teachers and the £30k starting salary for teachers plus the potential increase of building costs including gas and electricity. It was suggested that information on this be collated and circulated to headteachers and business managers to highlight the issue. Hilary Wood noted that the school finance team had the information and shared it with schools so they could share it with academies. It was also commented that there was an assumption that government expected the Schools Supplementary Grant to cover inflation pressures and no further funding was anticipated.

There were no further questions on the DGS Budget Proposal for 2022/23.

Action:

- **Information on increasing running costs for schools be collated and circulated to headteachers and business managers (Hilary Wood).**

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9 COVID FUNDING UPDATE

Hilary Wood presented an update regarding financial support provided in the education sector during the Covid-19 outbreak since the previous meeting. Information was provided on the in-school vaccination programme and air cleaning units, the national tutoring programme and the national testing programme for schools and colleges.

It was proposed and agreed that information on the financial support provided in the education sector during the Covid-19 outbreak would be presented as required rather than as a standing item.

Resolved

- **Information on the financial support provided in the education sector during the Covid-19 outbreak would be presented as required rather than as a standing item.**

10 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as Tuesday 14 June 2022.

It was recognised that the meeting would be held in person if feasible.

11 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The glossary of terms was provided for information.

Chairman

(The meeting ended 10.05am)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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