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MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 9 MARCH 2021

Present:

Maintained Primary School Head Teachers/Representative

Dr E Allen, St John Vianney
Ms H Moreton, Holy Family

Special School Maintained Representative

Mr N Oldham, Highfurlong

Special School Academy / Free School Representative

Ms G Hughes, Park Community Academy

Academy School Representatives

Ms A Bailey, Highfield (Star Academies)
Mr S Eccles, St Mary's (BEBCMAT)
Mr R Farley, Westminster (FCAT) (Chair)
Ms T Harrison, Thames / Roseacre (AtC)
Mr M McIver, St George's/Baines Endowed (Cidari)

Pupil Referral Unit

Ms W Casson, Educational Diversity

Non-Schools Members

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

In Attendance:

Councillor K Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools, Education and Aspiration
Mr M Golden, Finance Manager
Ms K Thompson, School Funding Officer
Mr P Turner, Interim 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 were received from Michelle Lonican, School Governor, Our Lady of the Assumption, Jill Gray, Blackpool Sixth Form College, Graeme Dow, Anchorsholme / Sea View and Phil Thompson, Head of SEND, Blackpool Council. Subsequent apologies were received from Edward Vitalis, South Shore/Marton (Bright Futures).

It was noted that due to retirement, Richard Rendall would no longer be a member of the Schools Forum, thanks were extended to him for his contributions to the Forum and best wishes were sent to him for his future. It was noted that the vacancy for the Early Years representative remained unfilled.

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Hilary Wood commented that there had been a well-received training session for new and existing members to outline the role of the Schools Forum. It had been agreed to produce a document outlining the acronyms used in the meetings and some context as to their meaning. This would be produced for the June 2021 Schools Forum meeting.

Resolved:

- **To provide a document listing acronyms for the next meeting (Hilary Wood / Kirsty Thompson).**

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that Gill Hughes, Park Academy Trust declared an interest relating to Item 6 of the Agenda. Park Academy was a part of the Sea View Trust which had been in discussions with the local authority in relation to the proposed provision to be provided at The Oracle in the future.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 12 January 2021 were considered and agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising from the minutes not discussed elsewhere on the Agenda included:

Moving on Up Fund – it was noted the Roger Farley had chased up a response from the Opportunity Area to ascertain whether funding was available for the Moving On Up programme. A response was awaited.

DSG and Covid-19 related costs – Information relating to Covid-19 related pressures was referenced at Item 5 and Item 9 of the Agenda. The local authority was also asked to quantify the costs relating to Covid-19 and share with North West colleagues, Hilary Wood reported that it was difficult to locate comparisons as each authority was dealing with the situation differently. The action was unable to be progressed. Additionally, the local authority was asked to determine whether there was any funding available for schools and early years due to the impact of Covid-19. It was noted that Covid-19 grants were not intended to offset costs covered by other ringfenced grants, therefore any DSG Covid-19 related costs would have to be covered using the DSG budget.

4 LOCAL AUTHORITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE

Paul Turner, Interim Assistant Director for School Improvement and SEND provided an update. It was acknowledged that primary pupils had returned to school full time from 8 March 2021 with some secondary pupils having a staggered return during the same week. It was noted that the Covid-19 testing in schools had commenced.

It was also reported that the Director of Children's Services recruitment had taken place and that there would be an announcement about the successful applicant in due course. Diane

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Booth the current Director of Children's Services was due to retire in March 2021.

There were no questions following the report.

5 DSG BUDGET MONITORING 2020-21

Mark Golden, Finance Manager, presented the report to show the budget position and reserves for the Dedicated Schools Grant as at 31 January 2021.

It was reported that budget monitoring to the end of January 2021 forecasted a £1.288m overspend against a deficit budget of £1,231m. The in-year shortfall was estimated at £2.519m. This, added to the brought forward deficit of £3.105m, saw a forecast DSG deficit by 31 March 2021 of £5.624m. The figures excluded the maintained school reserves of £2.392m and specific Union Fees reserve of £48k.

Mark Golden highlighted the major in year variances as: the continuing rise in special school numbers creating a pressure of £316k; costs being incurred for the new Resource provision of £409k which should see a future reduction in Out of Borough placements; one off Covid-19 related costs within Out of Borough placements and Post 16 education totalling £542k; and a non Covid-19 demand pressure of £169k and mainstream top up costs of £270k due to increased inclusion. It was noted that the pressures had been partially offset by an under spend on the historic commitments funding of £733k.

It was acknowledged that the increase in mainstream top-up costs could be viewed as a positive as this could be linked to greater levels of inclusion, however the consequent reduction in costs of specialist placements was yet to be seen.

There were no questions following the report.

6 HIGH NEEDS UPDATE

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources, presented an update on the latest developments relevant to the High Needs budget for information. It was acknowledged that Blackpool was experiencing financial pressures on its High Needs Budget. A medium term financial plan had been developed to monitor forecast expenditure against the High Needs Budget and factor in predictions of where savings were achievable.

It was reported that despite additional government funding in 2020/21, pupil numbers in special schools, out of Borough placements and post 16 placements continued to rise. Costs were forecast to exceed High Needs funding allocations by £3.274m so the cumulative deficit against the DSG would reach £5.625m by the end of 2020/21. It was reported that the local authority had already started to implement some of the proposals from its 'Vision for SEND and Alternative Provision', although savings would only accrue in future years.

The medium term financial plan was presented with the forecasts and provisional funding allocation for 2021/22. Assumptions had been made in future years about the continuation of funding for the contribution to combined budgets on a reducing basis. No assumption

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had been made in the medium term financial plan regarding any increases in High Needs funding for 2022/23 nor had any cost increases been built in, it was anticipated that further increases in funding would arise in the third and final year of the announced three year settlement for schools and High Needs.

It was reported that the agreed transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs block in 2021/22 had been expected to lead to an in-year surplus. However, it was noted that increasing pressures had resulted in a forecast overspend on the High Needs Budget of £967k and a cumulative deficit of £5.952m by the end of the next financial year. Therefore, under current assumptions, the cumulative deficit would rise to £8.239m by the end of 2024/25.

Due to the worsening position, it was acknowledged that Blackpool risked intervention by the Education and Skills Funding Agency. The deficit at March 2020 represented 2.76% of the overall DSG allocation and ranked Blackpool as 34th worst. The equivalent percentage at March 2021 could rise to 4.64% of the overall DSG, placing Blackpool at 17th worst based on the 2020 rankings.

Hilary Wood reported that she had discussed the impact of intervention with a local authority who had experienced the process and described the intensity of the scrutiny that might be involved in the absence of a clear plan to reverse the deficit.

It was reported that a planned, detailed analysis of the High Needs budget lines would focus attention and provide a clearer picture of high needs funding. The analysis would be available to present to the Schools Forum meeting in June 2021.

Progress on the nine aspects of the 'Vision for Exceptional SEND and Alternative Provision' was presented and it was noted that the Local Post 16 specialist provision had not yet started but that there were discussions underway with Sea View Trust as to the potential use of the Oracle site.

The original forecast recovery from the Vision of SEND and Alternative Provision was presented against the latest forecast in the medium-term financial plan. There was a growing disparity between the plans and the forecast. It was recognised that the cumulative deficit could continue to rise with £8.239m still to recover by the end of 2024/25.

It was also reported that the Equipment Policy would be revised as a part of the refresh of council SEND policies. It was noted that the new policy would require schools to meet the cost of equipment for pupils as reasonable adjustments. Currently schools were required to contribute £300 towards costs of equipment. The new policy would require schools to meet the first £500 towards the cost of equipment; should a child have no Education Health and Care Plan, the school would be expected to meet the full cost of the equipment. The equipment would be education based only.

It was also reported that the Department for Education had issued a consultation on specific proposals for a small number of changes to the High Needs National Funding Formula on 10 February 2021 for the 2022/23 financial year. Views were also sought on some of the longer

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term changes to the formula. It was noted that the consultation was based on a planned review of the High Needs National Funding Formula first introduced in 2018/19.

Views were sought on how the high needs funding was allocated through the National Funding Formula rather than the level of funding. The consultation was closely linked to the SEND review which was considering the reforms introduced following the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014. A consultation on the findings of the SEND review was anticipated in Spring 2021 with subsequent consultation later in 2021 on the changes to the distribution of high needs funding.

It was reported that the consultation included proposals about changes to the historic spend factor, attainment data used in the High Needs National Funding Formula, and the effective proxies for SEND and Alternative Provision in the High Needs National Formula. A link to the consultation which would close on 24 March 2021 was noted.

There were various questions following the report.

One member requested further information on the anticipated action that could be expected if the Education Skills and Funding Agency intervened due to the worsening deficit position. In response, it was noted that they may look at how money was allocated and some examples were given. Hilary Wood provided assurance that the local authority would look to work quickly to identify what could be addressed beforehand.

One member requested clarity on the wording of the revised Equipment Policy. It was noted that some equipment does not link directly to a child's education but was requested as a part of their health assessment. Hilary Wood agreed to raise the issue with the Head of SEND to request that the Policy wording reflected this.

One member commented that there was commitment from head teachers to take part in discussion through the High Needs Working Group which had been previously established should the local authority require it for discussions relating to the High Needs deficit plans. Hilary Wood acknowledged that it would be beneficial for the group to meet once some initial analysis had been undertaken.

Forum Members would welcome a more comprehensive update at the June 2021 Schools Forum meeting.

Resolved:

- **A more comprehensive update on the High Needs Funding would be presented at the June 2021 Schools Forum meeting (Hilary Wood).**
- **Comments on the Equipment Policy to be shared with the Head of SEND to reflect that some equipment does not link directly to a child's education but was requested as a part of their health assessment (Hilary Wood).**

7 EARLY YEARS FUNDING FORMULA 2021/22

Kirsty Thompson, School Funding Officer presented the report and Members were asked to

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agree the local authority's proposed funding formula for Early Years funding for three and four year olds early education as well as the value of the Inclusion Fund for 2021/22 and to note the funding rate for two year olds.

It was reported that the Department for Education announced an increase in three and four year old funding rates for Blackpool of 6 pence per child per hour for 2021/22. The rate had risen to £4.50 from £4.44 in 2020/21. The local authority was permitted to retain up to 5% of early years funding towards the cost of central expenses for the administration of the grant but the local authority proposed to pass through the full amount of the government increase to the Early Years providers. The Base rate in the local formula was noted to rise to £4.18 per hour compared to £4.12 in 2020/21.

It was noted 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. The proposed value of the fund for 2021/22 was £30,000.

It was noted that the government funding for eligible two year olds had increased by 8 pence from £5.28 per child per hour for 2020/21 to £5.36 for 2021/22. The local authority intended to pass through the full amount of the government increase to Early Years providers and increase the rate to £5.17 from £5.09 in 2020/21.

Following a vote restricted to schools members and PVI members, it was agreed to approve the local authority's proposed formula for three and four year old early education for 2021/22. It was also agreed that the Early Years Inclusion fund for three and four years olds be maintained at £30,000 and it was further agreed to note the funding rate for two year olds at £5.17 per hour as outlined.

Resolved:

- **School and PVI Forum Members agreed to approve the local authority's proposed formula for three and four year old early education for 2021/22.**
- **School and PVI Forum Members agreed that the Early Years Inclusion fund for three and four years olds be maintained at £30,000 for 2021/22.**
- **School and PVI Forum Members agreed to note the funding rate for two year olds at £5.17 per hour for 2021/22.**

8 DSG BUDGET PROPOSAL 2021/22

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources, presented an update on the proposals for the use of the Dedicated Schools Grant 2021/22 for approval. It was noted that the provisional estimates presented to the Schools Forum meeting in January 2021 had been updated.

It was reported that the Schools Block allocation was £95.312m. The agreed transfer of 0.5% equating to £457k had been made to the High Needs Block and a transfer from the growth contingency of £91k had been added into the Schools Block. The total amount allocated to schools and academies through the local schools formula was £94.946m

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It was reported that the Central Schools Block allocation for 2021/22 was £1.283m comprising of £643k of ongoing funding plus a reduced amount of £640k in respect of the historic contribution to combined budgets. The review of the Children's Centres meant that the £640k was surplus to requirements and could be used to offset the DSG deficit.

It was reported that the High Needs expenditure had worsened since the January 2021 Schools Forum meeting with estimates amounting to £27.127m. Funding comprised of £25.369m from the High Needs Block, the transfer of £457k from the Schools Block plus £333k Free School Funding paid directly by the Education and Skills Funding Agency. The total of £26.160m left a shortfall of £967k in the High Needs funding block.

It was reported that the Early Years Block expenditure against the provisional Early Years Block allocation of £8.783m showed a break even position. The allocations would be updated following the January 2021 and January 2022 census completion. The funding from central government saw an increase of 8 pence per child per hour for two year olds and 6 pence per child per hour for three and four year olds.

In summary, it was noted that the net pressure on the High Needs Block of £967k would be partially offset by the surplus on the Central Schools Block of £640k resulting in an anticipated in year deficit of £327k.

Following the report there were no questions.

Following a vote of all Schools Forum Members, it was agreed to approve the proposal for the use of the Dedicated Schools Grant in 2021/22.

Resolved:

- **All Schools Forum Members in attendance agreed to approve the proposal for the use of the Dedicated Schools Grant in 2021/22.**

9 COVID-19

Kirsty Thompson, School Funding Officer presented an overview of the financial support provided in the education sector during the Covid-19 outbreak for information.

It was reported that the information presented an outline of the Covid-19 funding available and suggested that the paper would be a standing item discussed at each of the Schools Forum meetings going forward. The summary of eight areas of funding outlined as available was not an exhaustive list and could be added to as necessary.

Thanks were extended to Kirsty Thompson for the production of the information. It was agreed that the information could be shared with head teachers as required. It was commented that the impact of Covid-19 on funding in schools was an issue for head teachers. One example included losses for before and after school provision and the impact of the furlough schemes on primary school budgets.

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Resolved:

- A report detailing a summary of financial support provided to early years, schools and post 16 education during Covid-19 to be included as a standing item as required.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as Tuesday 15 June 2021.

Chairman

(The meeting ended 10.04am)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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