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MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2021

Present:

Maintained Primary School Head Teachers/Representative

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

Maintained Primary School Governor Representative

Ms M Lonican, School Governor, Our Lady of the Assumption

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)
Mr M McIver, St George's/Baines Endowed (Cidari)
Mr E Vitalis, South Shore/Marton (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
Ms J Gray, Blackpool Sixth Form College
Mr R Rendell, Langdale Nursery, Early Years (left the meeting at 10am)

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 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)

1 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Hilary Wood welcomed attendees to the meeting. It was acknowledged that there were a number of new members following the elections to Schools Forum and introductions were made, apologies were subsequently received from Graeme Dow (Anchorsolme / Sea View).

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2021

Formal thanks were extended to the Members who had left the Schools Forum Membership but contributed significantly to the group.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were noted.

3 MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources presented the Membership Update to inform the group of the outcome of elections to Schools Forum for the term of office running from 1 January 2021 to 31 August 2023. The term of office would align with the academic year. It was noted that Jill Gray was the representative for Post 16 education not Jane Gray as indicated in the report.

There were no comments or questions and the report was noted.

4 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Forum considered the election of a Chairman of the Schools Forum until August 2021.

Resolved:

- **The Forum elected Roger Farley (Westminster / FCAT Academy School Representative) as Chairman of the Schools Forum until August 2021.**

5 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

Having been elected, Roger Farley took the role of Chair from this point of the meeting. The Forum considered the election of a Vice Chairman of the Schools Forum until August 2021.

Resolved:

- **The Forum elected Edward Vitalis (South Shore / Marton / Bright Futures Academy School Representative) as Vice Chairman of the Schools Forum until August 2021.**

6 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 13 October 2020 were considered and agreed as an accurate record. At item 4, 'Review Forum Membership and Constitution', the term of office had been corrected from 2022 to 2023 as there had been an error in the date on the original report. The amended date was accepted.

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

Illuminate Funding – it was reiterated that the Illuminate Funding should be automatically provided with the child place. In cases where there was incomplete information relating to the child, a school could approach the Local Authority's Admissions Team and request the

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2021

funding.

Moving On Up Fund – it was noted that Roger Farley would chase up a response from the Opportunity Area to ascertain whether funding was available for the Moving On Up programme. It was noted that there had been delays in relation to the programme due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Unison Duties – following the recommendation at the October 2020 meeting, headteachers were consulted and chose proposal B in relation to the use of the accumulated union duty funds. Proposal B included:

- Inclusion of two days per week for a Unison school representative(s) to be released from school, funded at the lower rate of £150 per day;
- Increase in the per pupil rate payable by schools and academies by 20p per pupil each year (cost of £5 per pupil in 5 years is still less than the current combined charge of £5.75 per pupil for PTA and Unison service offers);
- An increase in the daily claim rate for teaching union representatives, from £180 in 2020/21 to £200 per day from 2021/22;
- Tapered reduction in accumulated reserves by the end of 5 years leaving a balance of approx. £11.7k, to be used for additional ad hoc claims.

7 LOCAL AUTHORITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE

Paul Turner, Head of Service for School Standards, Safeguarding and Inclusion provided an overview report. It was noted that since the time of writing the report and the subsequent national lockdown, all GCSE and Key Stage 2 examinations had been cancelled for 2021. Leaders were unsure of what the assessment process would include for 2021 and awaited guidance from the Department for Education.

It was further noted that Blackpool schools were supporting families with the lockdown and learning at home.

There were no comments or questions and the report was noted.

8 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 noted that Blackpool was facing financial pressures on the High Needs budget. The Medium Term Financial Plan had been developed to monitor forecast expenditure against the High Needs Budget.

Despite the additional government funding in 2020/21, pupil numbers in special schools, Out of Borough and post-16 placements continued to increase with forecast in-year overspend of £2.8million and a cumulative deficit against the DSG of £5.1million by the end of 2020/21. It was noted that the local authority had started to implement some of the proposals from its Vision for SEND and Alternative Provision where savings would accrue in

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2021

future years.

The Medium Term Financial Plan had been revised to include updated forecasts and provisional funding allocation for 2021/22. While no assumption had been made in the plan regarding increases in the High Needs funding for 2022/23, nor had cost increases been included, it was anticipated that an increase in funding would be received following the final year announcement of the three year settlement for school and High Needs.

The Medium Term Financial Plan assumed that a transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in 2021/22 would be made in line with the proposal presented to Schools Forum. This would lead to an in-year surplus of £84k on the High Needs Budget and would reduce the cumulative deficit to £4.4million by the end of the next financial year. On current assumptions, the cumulative deficit would reduce to £1.3million by the end of 2024/25.

The report highlighted more uncertain times financially.

Comments and questions were sought.

In relation to the deficit, it was asked whether the Government had made any indication of which Local Authorities they would target for intervention. It was noted that the Government had contacted a small number of local authorities with the highest deficit in 2020/21 and a similar number was expected in 2021/22. It was recognised that Blackpool were the Authority with the sixth highest deficit in the North West. There was not confirmation of which local authorities would be targeted next year.

9 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2020-2021

Mark Golden, Finance Manager presented the report to show the budget position and reserves for the Dedicated Schools Grant as at 30 November 2020. The budget monitoring to the end of November 2020 forecasted a £811k over spend against a planned deficit of £1.231million. The total in-year shortfall was estimated at £2.042million. In addition to the brought forward deficit of £3.105million, the forecast for the cumulative DSG deficit by 31 March 2021 was £5.147million. This did not include the maintained schools reserves of £2.392million or the specific Union Duties reserve of £48k.

The pressures were recognised as those highlighted in the High Needs Block relating to special school numbers and costs of extended places due to the Covid-19 pandemic in out of borough provision and post-16 places.

Comments and questions were sought.

It was commented that plans to reduce the deficit in the DSG in Blackpool were ambitious with significant investment in inclusion and it would be detrimental to the ambitious plan for Government to intervene and look at spending before the plan was implemented.

Similarly, it was recognised that monitoring of the early years budget was difficult due to the

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2021

impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Adjustments to payments to providers were to be made for the autumn term, and funding would be based on the the pre-covid January 2020 census. It was agreed that Mark Golden would request a report on the full implications of Covid-19 pressures on the schools budget and early years.

It was asked whether the local authority could claim back funding relating to Covid-19. It was noted that the local authority had been allocated some funding in response to Covid-19 but this was not specific to the DSG or early years. It was suggested that Blackpool could quantify the costs for schools and early years and share the information with North West colleagues. It was also agreed that Roger Farley would contact the Leader of the Council to determine if there was any funding.

Resolved:

- **Mark Golden to request a report on the full implications of Covid-19 pressures on the schools budget and early years budget.**
- **The Local Authority to quantify the costs relating to Covid-19 and share with North West colleagues.**
- **Roger Farley to contact the Leader of the Council to determine if any funding was available in relation to schools and early years relating to the impact of Covid-19.**

10 SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA 2021 - 2022 PROPOSALS

Kirsty Thompson, Schools Funding Officer presented the report outlining the local authority's proposal for the schools funding formula for 2021/22. It was reported that local authorities were required to consult with their Schools Forum members on decisions relating to Schools Funding Formula proposals. Relevant members including those from schools and early years were recommended to consider the following principles and approve the proposal of the school funding in 2021/22:

- Continue to apply the National Funding Formula unit value with the exception of Basic Entitlement values.
- Set a minimum funding guarantee of 2% per pupil funding;
- Transfer 0.50% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, by way of a reduction in the Basic Entitlement formula values;
- Transfer £91k from the growth funding contingency into the Schools Block.

It was noted that the first stage of the consultation received 23 responses in total. While the proposal to transfer 0.50% to the High Needs block was supported by a significant majority of respondents through the consultation, an alternative proposal was made regarding the methodology for calculating the contribution from individual schools. A second stage of the consultation was therefore carried out, asking for views on two alternative methods for releasing 0.5% from the Schools Block: a cap on gains, or a reduction in the Basic Entitlement factor value.

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2021

It was reiterated that the two parts of the consultation were based on illustrative data that was later updated in December 2020. It was acknowledged that it was difficult for the local authority to consult with schools on the formula when the data was received in late December and the government return was required for submission in January. Using the new data, it was noted that the original proposal to effect the 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block by way of a cap on gains would see a significant impact on one school. The local authority therefore proposed that the transfer was effected by way of a reduction to the Basic Entitlement. The impact of the two alternatives on individual schools was outlined in appendix 10a.

Questions and comments were sought.

It was commented that initially 23 responses were received however on the follow up consultation only nine responses were received and the response was split with five votes to four. Concern was raised regarding the lack of votes and whether schools understood the process or chose not to respond. A further comment agreed that it was a close vote.

It was asked whether there could be a further email to consult with schools. Hilary Wood indicated that ultimately, the local authority was responsible for the formula but were required to consult with schools. A further email to consult may lead to delays and the possibility of a further inconclusive response.

A further comment suggested that a response of nine people was not the lowest response rate received following a consultation exercise. It was also reiterated that a response was required in order to reduce delay in funding agreement.

Looking at the information outlined in Appendix 10a, members acknowledged that Option B was the fairest option, as it spread the required contribution over a larger number of schools. Hilary Wood confirmed that, given the significant impact of option A on one school, the local authority would recommend option B and would not support option A.

Relevant members including those from schools and early years were recommended to approve the proposal for the allocation of school funding in 2021/22 and all in attendance at the meeting agreed. The Early Years representative was not in attendance for this vote.

In addition, Councillor Benson was asked to give member approval for the proposal and agreed.

Resolved:

- **The Local Authority proposal for the allocation of school funding in 2021/22 was approved by members from school and early years who were in attendance.**
- **The Local Authority proposal for the schools funding formula in 2021/22 was given member approval by Councillor Benson.**

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2021

11 DRAFT DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT 2021-2022 BUDGET PROPOSAL

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources presented the provisional estimates for the use of Dedicated Schools Grant in 2021/22 for information. It was noted that final proposals for the allocation of funding would be brought to the March 2021 Schools Forum meeting. It was noted that the increase in allocation was close to £10million.

It was noted that there would be a dedicated training session for Schools Forum members on 3 February 2021 to provide information on the DSG.

It was noted that the Schools Block funding was ring-fenced and had increased by £6.6million equating to almost 7.5%. The Local Authority was looking to add £91k to this from the growth fund contingency and also transfer 0.5% to the High Needs Block which amounted to £457k.

It was reported that the Central Schools Block had decreased by £140k, including a reduction of £160k in the historic commitment funding in line with the planned unwinding of this element of the grant by the Department for Education. The remaining £640k historic commitment funding could be used to help offset the cumulative deficit on DSG.

The High Needs block had seen an increase of £3.1million including £434k relating to the Teachers' Pay Grant and the Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution Grant being included in the national formula. The remaining £2.7million represented an increase of 11.9% on the previous year's allocation. The estimated costs of the High Needs Budget exceeded the available funding of £373k. This would be covered by the proposed transfer of £457k from the Schools Block, resulting in a contribution of £84k towards offsetting the cumulative deficit on DSG.

It was proposed that the Early Years Block funding was fully allocated to the Early Years provision and serviced. The hourly rate for 3 and 4 year olds had increased by 6pence to £4.50 (1.35%) and the rate for 2 year olds increased by 8pence to £5.36 (1.51%). There were no increases in the per pupil funding amounts for Early Years Pupil Premium or Disability Access Fund.

It was reported that with the proposed transfer of funding from the Schools Block, it was estimated that the in-year surplus on DSG would be £724k, reducing the forecast cumulative deficit at 31 March 2022 to £4,425k.

It was commented that it was positive news that the deficit was reducing.

12 DE-DELEGATION OF SERVICES AND RETENTION OF FUNDING FOR EDUCATION FUNCTIONS 2021 - 2022

Kirsty Thompson, School Funding Officer presented the report. Approval was sought from relevant members for the continued de-delegation of services and the retention of funding for Education Functions.

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2021

The local authority recommended that de-delegation be approved by maintained primary school representatives for 2021/22 in respect of Free School Meal (FSM) Eligibility Checks. In order to fund the current level of service the de-delegation amount per Free School Meal pupil would be set at £13 in 2021/22 compared to £12.65 in 2020/21. The increase equated to 2.75% in line with the local government 2020/21 pay award.

Following a vote, the maintained primary school representatives in attendance agreed to approve the de-delegation for 2021/22 in respect of Free School Meal (FSM) Eligibility Checks.

The local authority recommended that de-delegation was approved by maintained primary school representatives for 2021/22 in respect of Union Duties. Historically this budget had been held centrally in order to fund the facilities time of the teaching unions. Unions were now included in the collective funding arrangements meaning that members of both teaching and non-teaching unions could be supported by local representatives during the school day. To cover this, the de-delegation amount for 2021/22 would increase by 20pence per pupil to £4.20 compared to £4.00 per pupil de-delegated in 2020/21. A letter from the teaching unions NAHT, NEU and ASCL had been sent to all Directors of Children's Services outlining the benefits of de-delegation of facilities time funding.

Following a vote, the maintained primary school representatives in attendance agreed to approve the de-delegation for 2021/22 in respect of Union Duties.

Finally, maintained school representatives including primary, special and pupil referral unit members were asked to approve an amount to be retained from school budgets in respect of education function, previously funded by the Education Services Grant. The 2021/22 amount had been calculated at £36.30 per pupil equating to a 2.75% increase on the 2020/21 in line with the local government pay award.

Following a vote, the maintained primary school representatives including primary, special and pupil referral unit members in attendance agreed to approve the amount of £36.30 per pupil to be retained from schools budgets in respect of education function, previously funded by the Education Services Grant.

Resolved:

- **The maintained primary school representatives in attendance agreed to approve the de-delegation for 2021/22 in respect of Free School Meal (FSM) Eligibility Checks.**
- **The maintained primary school representatives in attendance agreed to approve the de-delegation for 2021/22 in respect of Union Duties.**
- **The maintained primary school representatives including primary, special and pupil referral unit members in attendance agreed to approve the amount of £36.30 per pupil to be retained from schools budgets in respect of education function, previously funded by the Education Services Grant.**

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2021

13 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as Tuesday 9 March 2021 at 9.15am, not 2019 as indicated on the Agenda.

Chairman

(The meeting ended 10.28am)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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