

# Public Document Pack

## MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 15 JUNE 2021

### **Present:**

#### **Maintained Primary School Head Teachers/Representative**

Ms H Moreton, Holy Family

#### **Primary Governor**

Ms M Lonicon, Our Lady

#### **Special School Maintained Representative**

Mr N Oldham, Highfurlong

#### **Academy / Free School Representatives**

Ms A Bailey, Highfield (Star Academies)

Mr S Brennand, Unity (FCAT)

Mr G Dow, Anchorsolme (Sea View)

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)

Mr E Vitalis, South Shore / Marton (Bright Futures)

#### **Pupil Referral Unit**

Ms W Casson, Educational Diversity

#### **Early Years**

Ms R Dey, Pebbles Day Nursery

#### **Post-16**

Ms J Gray, Blackpool Sixth Form

#### **Non-Schools Members**

Ms A Baines, Staff/Teacher Associations

#### **In Attendance:**

Ms S Butler, Advanced Practitioner, School Standards, Safeguarding and inclusion (**Item 8 only**)

Mr M Golden, Finance Manager

Ms K Thompson, School Funding Officer

Mr P Thompson, Head of SEND

Mr P Turner, Assistant Director – Education, SEND and Early Years

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 Elaine Allen, St John Vianney, Gill Hughes, Park Academy, Neil Adams, Unison, Councillor K Benson

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and Councillor J Hobson.

It was acknowledged that Rachel Dey had joined the Schools Forum membership to represent Early Years.

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest noted at the meeting.

### 3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

(Rachel Dey and Graeme Dow arrived during this item)

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 9 March 2021 were considered and agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising from the minutes:

**Acronyms** – a list of acronyms had been included on the Agenda at item 13.

**Moving on Up Fund** – a response from the Opportunity Area to ascertain whether funding was available for the Moving on Up programme was still awaited (Roger Farley), it was noted that there was an item regarding other issues relating to the Moving on Up programme at item 8.

**High Needs** – at the March 2021 meeting, a more comprehensive High Needs update was requested for the June 2021 meeting. It was noted that as this was not possible, a more comprehensive update would be provided at the October 2021 meeting, as more detailed work was underway.

**Equipment Policy** - Comments on the Equipment Policy had been 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.

**Financial Support during Covid-19** – a standing item had been included on the Agenda at item 9.

### 4 LOCAL AUTHORITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE

(Simon Brennand and Phil Thompson arrived during this item)

Paul Turner, Assistant Director for Education, SEND and Early Years provided a report outlining an overview of recent developments with the Local Authority. In addition, relating to Covid-19, it was noted that cases had risen due to the Delta variant and this could impact on budgets within schools as they responded to the rise in cases.

In relation to inclusion, it was noted that Blackpool Football Club Community Trust was opening an independent school to support secondary pupils that struggled in a mainstream setting but had a keen interest in sport and physical activity. It was noted that the local

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authority had agreed to subsidise the cost of places at the new school for the first two academic years following a presentation to the Alternative Provision Quality Assurance Panel.

Questions and comments were welcomed following the report.

One member commented that the proposed provision at Blackpool Football Club Community Trust seemed very positive.

One member sought clarity as to whether the Opportunity Area Year Five funding was based on an academic year or a financial year for 2021-22 and whether a breakdown of allocations of the £1.5million in additional funding would be available. It was confirmed that the funding was based on a school year. A breakdown of spend would be presented to the Opportunity Area Board and schools would receive a service level agreement with details of funding for their school.

One member asked on behalf of NEU and Unison whether there had been any changes in advice to schools on the use of face coverings due to the Delta variant of Covid-19 and commented that all unions advocated the use of face masks. It was confirmed that there had been no update from the Director of Public Health in Blackpool but that some schools had decided to enforce mask wearing. It was noted that any future updates from Public Health would be circulated.

### **5 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT YEAR END BUDGET MONITORING 2020-2021**

Mark Golden Finance Manager provided the report outlining the budget position of the Dedicated Schools Grant for the Financial Year End at 31 March 2021 and the amount of Dedicated Schools Grant reserves as at 31 March 2021.

It was reported that there were significant pressures on the High Needs block. Work was ongoing to manage the cost pressures with the development of a High Needs Block Medium Term Financial Plan incorporating an inclusion strategy and the opening of a social, emotional and mental health Free School. However, it was reported that expenditure continued to outstrip Department for Education funding in the short term.

The High Needs Budget had been overspent by £1.994m in 2020-21 as a result of previously reported pressures in special schools, the new resource provision, maintained top-up funding and Post-16 placements.

It was reported that Schools Forum set a deficit budget of £1.232m for the 2020-21 financial year, adding the over spend of £1.429m had resulted in a total in-year deficit of £2.661m. The position as at 31 March 2021, after incorporating the brought forward balance of £3.105m, was a total deficit of £5.766m.

It was noted that Maintained School balances increased from £2.39m to £3.92m over the year to 31 March 2021. There were no schools in deficit with an average balance as a percentage of School Budget Share at 15.2%, up from 11.6%.

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Questions and comments were welcomed following the report.

One member asked how the deficit in Blackpool compared to peers in other authorities. In response, it was acknowledged that most were also struggling with the pressures on the High Needs block. It was noted that those local authorities with the highest deficit would attract intervention and scrutiny from the Department for Education.

### **6 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2021-2022**

Mark Golden Finance Manager provided the report outlining the budget position of the 2021-22 Dedicated Schools Grant as at 30 April 2021 and the amount of Dedicated Schools Grant reserves as at 30 April 2021.

It was reported that budget monitoring to the end of April 2021 forecasted a £362k over spend against a deficit budget of £327k. Therefore, the total in-year shortfall was estimated at £689k. Added to the brought forward deficit of £5.766m the resulting forecast Dedicated Schools Grant deficit by 31 March 2022 was £6.455m. This excluded the maintained schools reserves (£3.919m) and the specific Union Fees reserve (£44k).

It was noted that the High Needs Block had increased to £27.1m from last year but emerging pressures were anticipated. The delivery of the Medium Term Financial Plan on the High Needs block would look at the options to bring down the deficit.

Questions and comments were welcomed following the report.

It was noted that the post-16 pressure of £228k would not all be recurring as some students had continued in education to allow them to complete their studies, which had been disrupted due to Covid-19.

### **7 HIGH NEEDS UPDATE**

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources provided a report to update on the latest developments relevant to the High Needs budget. It was noted that a more comprehensive report would be available at the October 2021 meeting to outline the internal work being undertaken by the local authority to address the High Needs deficit.

It was reported that a medium-term financial plan had been developed to monitor expenditure against the High Needs Budget and to outline predictions of where savings could be made.

It was also noted that despite additional government funding in 2020/21 and 2021/22, pupil numbers in high cost placements continued to increase. Forecasts showed costs in 2021/22 would exceed the High Needs funding allocation by around £1.8 million. Despite transfers from the Schools Block and the Central Schools Services Block to offset pressures, the cumulative deficit against Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) looked set to increase by a further £690k this year, reaching £6.5 million by March 2022, the equivalent to almost 5% of the

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total DSG.

It was reported that since the last meeting of Schools Forum, an estimate had been built in of a potential 10% increase in High Needs funding for 2022/23. This would be the third and final year of the announced three-year settlement for schools and High Needs, with increases for Blackpool in the first two years equating to approximately 11% each year. Assumptions had been made about inflationary uplifts on relevant expenditure lines in 2022/23. No assumptions had yet been made about increases to income or costs beyond 2022/23.

It had also been assumed that a 0.5% transfer from Schools Block would continue to be required in future years. This was shown on the Medium-Term Financial Plan for illustration purposes in each year until 2025/26, when it was anticipated that the Hard National Funding Formula may be implemented. A cumulative deficit on overall DSG of almost £1 million would remain at the end of 2025/26.

It was reported that all of the proposals from the Local Authority's Vision for SEND and Alternative Provision had been implemented, with the exception of the review of local post-16 specialist provision, for which more time was being taken to consider options. It was noted that the work with the Oracle would not have the same cost saving as anticipated.

It was further reported that the Local Authority continued with analysis and scrutiny of High Needs pupil number and cost trends with a view to refining a strategic plan for the commissioning of specialist places.

A consultation on banded funding for pupils with SEND in special schools and mainstream schools was undertaken and closed on 11 June 2021. It was noted that the extraordinary meeting of the Schools Forum scheduled for 5 July 2021 to discuss the findings of the consultation would be cancelled to allow further discussion with schools and trusts. The changes would not be implemented in September 2021, as originally planned.

Questions and comments were welcomed following the report.

It was noted that the in-year position improved by £2.3m in 2022-23 and it was asked how realistic this was and whether this was due to an increase in income or reduction in spend? In response, Mark Golden confirmed that the improved position was due to the anticipated increase in income.

One member asked whether there was any feedback on some of the concerns raised through the consultation on banding for special education needs. In response, Hilary Wood confirmed that there was a lot of information to sift through and any themes would be identified and the local authority would look to create a banding document that was fit for purpose. In response to a question asking whether schools would be included in the process, Hilary Wood confirmed that there would need to be modelling at school level and that the local authority would engage with schools in order to carry out this work.

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### 8 MOVING ON UP - UPDATE

Sharon Butler, Advanced Practitioner, Resilience Coach Team attended the meeting for this item to present the report to request the continuation of funding from the High Needs Block for the Resilience Coaches to provide targeted support to pupils in their transition from primary to secondary school.

Members were requested to approve the allocation of £216k per year from the High Needs Block to fund Resilience Coaches, as set out in the proposal and to approve the allocation of a further £48k from the High Needs Block to fund mental health counselling support within the Resilience Coach team. It was reported that the continuation of funding was subject to evaluation of the ongoing effectiveness of the Moving On Up programme. Members were also recommended to consider the proposal as a 'spend to save initiative', and part of the wider early help for children. As young people benefitted from the support via the Resilience Coach Team the outcomes were intended to reduce further outgoings for schools, to improve attendance and attainment, and to reduce exclusion figures.

It was reported that Moving On Up involved Resilience Coaches providing support to pupils, families and schools to ensure an effective transition from primary to secondary school. Pupils with low resilience were identified for support through the Student Resilience Survey or via teachers' assessment of them. It was acknowledged that the programme was supporting 146 young people in 2021 including support for all of 'our children' in Blackpool.

It was noted that a Resilience Therapy approach was used to support children with low resilience and was available to all Blackpool Schools. The young people identified to access the programme may have additional needs as well and the team contributed to the early help assessments. Funding was also requested for a mental health counsellor to work in the team and provide early intervention support.

Questions and comments were welcomed.

One member commented that it was clear to see the need for the services but asked how integrated the scheme was with Blackpool Mental Health Partnership and if there was any overlap of provision. In response, Sharon Butler confirmed that joined up working did take place and where a child may already access support from services, an alternative child may be identified to benefit from the Moving on Up programme as there were only two funded places per class.

Paul Turner commented that the Resilience Coach team had moved across into the School Standards, Safeguarding and Inclusion service and linked in with other pastoral support. It was recognised that the waiting list for CAHMS was long and that there were limited resources. The Education sector was supporting the mental health provision.

One member asked whether financial support from secondary schools could be ring-fenced to fund any additional pupils identified, as the financial burden was on primary budgets in the first instance as the year 6 children were in primary settings. In response, Sharon Butler confirmed that work with the year 6 children began prior to the transition to high school

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and the children would not know which high school they had been allocated.

It was queried as to why there were 120 places on the programme. It was noted that two places had been allocated per year 6 class and each Resilience Coach worked with 20 young people. It was recognised that costs were currently only included within the budget up to December 2021, so approval of continued funding would affect the budget deficit.

It was further commented that there needed to be discussions as to which initiatives to continue to support and fund from SEND budgets. It was requested that discussion be held at Schools Forum in early 2022.

Following a vote, all members in attendance agreed to approve the allocation of £216k p.a from the High Needs Block to fund Resilience Coaches and to approve a further £48k from the High Needs Block to fund mental health counselling support within the Resilience Coach Team.

### **Resolved:**

- **All Forum Members in attendance agreed to approve the allocation of £216k per year from the High Needs Block to fund Resilience Coaches, as set out in the proposal.**
- **All Forum Members in attendance agreed to approve the allocation of a further £48k from the High Needs Block to fund mental health counselling support within the Resilience Coach team, as set out in the proposal.**
- **Discussion of which initiatives to continue to support from SEND budgets to be scheduled for a Schools Forum meeting in early 2022.**

(Sharon Butler left the meeting after item 8)

## **9 COVID-19 FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

Kirsty Thompson, School Funding Officer provided an update report of activity since the last meeting regarding financial support provided in the education sector during the COVID outbreak. It was noted that the report only contained details of any changes since the previous meeting.

It was reported that the Department for Education had announced a further £1.4 billion over the next three years to provide 100 million hours of tutoring and additional teacher training and development. This was in addition to the £1.7 billion already announced, and would be targeted at those children and young people considered most in need of support, particularly the disadvantaged, and would not be available for all pupils.

It was reported that the new education recovery package funding came directly from the Department for Health and Social Care, the first payments had been made and the second ones were due to be paid after the summer term. Any payments from the autumn term onwards would be confirmed depending on the pandemic situation at that time.

Following the update, questions and comments were welcomed.

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It was commented that the justification for spend and closing the gap using the catch up premium fund was a key focus for Ofsted, looking at the detail and quality of the spend.

### **10 CHANGE TO SCHOOLS FORUM REGULATIONS - IMPACT ON MEETINGS**

Kirsty Thompson, School Funding Officer provided a report to highlight the change to regulations affecting the conduct of meeting for Schools Forum. It was noted that historically, Schools Forum meetings were held face to face. Due to the coronavirus, rules were relaxed to allow meetings to be held remotely. The Schools Forum (England) (Coronavirus) Amendment Regulations 2020 had made the temporary arrangements permanent.

Following discussion, it was agreed to continue to hold the virtual meetings and look to hold face to face meetings once social distancing measures were relaxed.

#### **Resolved:**

- **To note the Schools Forum (England) (Coronavirus) Amendment Regulations 2020 had made the temporary arrangements permanent.**
- **To look to hold face to face meetings once social distancing measures had been relaxed.**

### **11 MEETING DATES 2022**

Schools Forum members considered and agreed the meeting dates for Schools Forum in 2022 as 18 January 2022, 15 March 2022, 14 June 2022 and 11 October 2022.

It was agreed to book the meetings from 9.15am to 11.5am initially with the view to extend the meeting time as required.

#### **Resolved:**

- **The meeting dates for 2022 were agreed with the new timeframe of 9.15am to 11.15am initially.**

### **12 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as Tuesday 12 October 2021.

Roger Farley extended thanks to Wendy Casson as she would retire from her post prior to the next meeting.

### **13 GLOSSARY**

The glossary of terms was noted for information.

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### **Chairman**

(The meeting ended 10.24am)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:  
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