

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 16 JANUARY 2018

Present:

Primary School Head Teachers/Representatives

Ms J Hirst, Bispham Endowed (Chairman)

Ms E Allen, St John Vianney

Pupil Referral Unit Head Teacher/Head Teacher Representative

Ms W Casson, Educational Diversity

Primary School Governor Representative

Ms M Lonican, School Governor representative

Academy School Representatives

Mr S Brennand, Unity

Mr R Farley, Westminster

Ms T Harrison, Thames

Mr D Medcalf, St Georges

Mr N Toyne, Devonshire

Ms H McKenzie OBE, Executive Principal, Highfield Leadership Academy

Special School Academy Representative

Ms S Fielder, Chair of Governors, Park Academy

Non-Schools Members

Ms A Baines, Staff/Teacher Associations

Mr D Dickinson, Staff/Teacher Associations

Mr R Rendell, Early Years Strategic Group

Ms S Hughes, Blackpool and Fylde College

In Attendance:

Cllr Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning

Mr S Thompson, Director of Resources

Mr M Golden, Finance Manager

Mr P Turner, Schools Safeguarding Adviser and Acting Head of School Standards and Effectiveness

Mr P Thompson, Head of SEND

Mr C Williams, Democratic Governance Adviser (Minutes)

Mr P Sharples, School Funding and PFI Manager

Mrs H Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources

1 MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Mrs Wood reported that following a review of the Forum membership, Michelle Lonican, Our Lady of the Assumption (governor representative), Roger Farley, Westminster (FCAT), Edward Vitalis, Marton/South Shore (Bright Futures), Chris Wardle, Highfield (Tauheedul), Rosie Sycamore, Highfurlong and Susan Fielder, Park (Blackpool MAT), had been appointed.

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The Chairman welcomed those new members that were present and thanked Cole Andrew, Cathy Butterworth, Graeme Dow and Susan Wilson for their service to the Forum.

2 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Forum agreed to elect Ms Jo Hirst as Chairman of the Schools Forum for 2018.

3 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

The Forum agreed to elect Nick Toyne as Vice Chairman of the Schools Forum for 2018.

4 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services, Blackpool Council, Janet Carroll, Headteacher, Roseacre, Edward Vitalis, Marton/South Shore (Bright Futures), Chris Wardle, Highfield (Tauheedul), Amanda Whitehead, Head of Schools Standards and Effectiveness, Lynn Donkin, Consultant in Public Health and Rosie Sycamore, Headteacher, Highfurlong.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

6 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 10 OCTOBER 2017

The minutes of the Schools Forum held on 10 October 2017 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting, with the exception that Amanda Baines had been in attendance.

Page 7: in relation to an action regarding In Year Fair Access Panels, it was noted that there would no longer be a Primary School representative on future Panels given the small number of primary cases dealt with so far.

7 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2017/2018

The Forum discussed items 8, 9 and 10 together as some of the recommendations outlined within each report contained elements of overlap especially in relation to subsequent decisions with financial implications.

Mr Golden provided some context to the financial position contained within the Dedicated School Grant Budget Monitoring 2017/2018 report. He explained that as reported at Forum in October 2017, there remained significant pressures on the High Needs Block and whilst work was ongoing by the Authority to manage the cost pressures in the medium term, with a new free school planned to be opened in September 2019, expenditure continued to exceed Department for Education funding in the short term. In particular, the Out of Borough placement forecast over spend had risen again and was expected to be £679,000 by the end of the financial year, and there was also an estimated overspend of £224,000 on special schools. It was also recognised that an error in the financial calculations in 2017 had resulted in a miscalculation of £388,358 being made.

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However, reassurances were provided that this would not happen again as the calculation methodology had been overhauled following the error.

It was noted that in excess of 100 children were currently placed Out of Borough and whilst the new free school would alleviate some of the associated costs, Forum members accepted that a new town-wide approach would be required to address the issue definitively and improve outcomes for those children with complex needs. The Chairman and others sought a renewed commitment from schools to keep those children in mainstream settings, where possible, until all other reasonable steps had been exhausted before considering Special School or Out of Borough placements. It was acknowledged that, were the DfE or ESFA to look at Blackpool's case, particularly in relation to potential bids for additional funding to offset placement costs, they would likely advise that more could be done within mainstream settings to improve outcomes and reduce the number of children in expensive alternative placements.

The Forum discussed the proposals in detail and agreed that the trend data was alarming and the situation regarding placements remained a key issue. For many members, the relatively quick move from a position of having healthy financial reserves to the current projections for deficit in the present and near-term financial years was one of the most significant issues facing education locally. It was reported that the number of placements of Blackpool children in specialist settings was significantly higher than the national average. Many Forum members agreed that Blackpool Schools could do more to ease the situation. Only by adopting this approach could gaps in provision, training and skills be uncovered and attitudes and practice be changed for the better. Mr Turner suggested that therapeutic methods, resilience building and restorative practice, which had worked in other areas with similar levels of deprivation and need, could be adopted.

The latest reported pressures would result in an unplanned in-year overspend of £912,000, which would absorb all reserves, and leave a forecast deficit at the year-end of £367,000.

Schools representatives pointed out that any future strategy to address the issues discussed would have to be a collaborative venture that involved the Local Authority working in partnership with Maintained schools, Academies and the PVI sector to achieve common goals. Upskilling the workforce and avoiding over reliance on one-to-one support as the primary method for schools to support children with additional complex needs were suggested. It was noted that some form of middle tier of support to bridge the gap between one-to-one support and placements would help to reduce the latter in particular and their associated high costs.

Following a question about what steps had been taken since the last Forum meeting in October 2017 to try and reduce the financial pressures outlined in the reports at Item 8, 9 and 10, Mrs Wood advised that reductions in funding by the SARP Panel, restructuring of the SEND team and the closure of two SERF units had contributed, though it was acknowledged that these measures and others had fallen short of offsetting the costs of the increasing number of placement and of avoiding a deficit position for the current financial year.

It was noted that there had been a significant level of costs associated with the redundancies of Special Support Assistants. Mr Golden was asked to provide a

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breakdown of these costs at the next meeting. It was confirmed that there were now only a small number of SSAs in the central bank, and a question was asked whether the offer of voluntary redundancy should be removed, given that there were no longer any available reserves.

Ms Hirst queried the budget for top-up in the Pupil Referral Unit, which stood at £50,000 more than the original budget agreed in March 2017. Mr Golden agreed to provide an explanation at the next meeting.

The Forum agreed:

1. To note the contents of the report and to defer the recommendations outlined in the report to be considered at the same time as those in items 9 and 10. (Please refer to Item 10 in this set of minutes for the full list of resolutions.)
2. That Mr Golden provide a breakdown of SSA voluntary redundancy payments at the next Forum meeting on 13 March 2018.
3. That the situation regarding the remaining SSAs be revisited and a discussion be held in conjunction with Human Resources at Blackpool Council to establish a course of action.
4. That Mr Golden investigate the difference in the budget for Pupil Referral Unit top-up compared to the original budget approved in March 2017.

8 DRAFT 2018/2019 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET PROPOSAL

The Forum discussed items 8, 9 and 10 together as some of the recommendations outlined within each report contained elements of overlap especially in relation to subsequent decisions with financial implications.

Mrs Wood reported that on 19 December 2017, the Department for Education issued the provisional allocations of Dedicated Schools Grant for 2018/2019 and that DSG would be set out in four spending blocks. Blackpool's allocations were as follows: Schools Block - £80.072m, Central Schools Services Block- £1.587m, High Needs Block - £18.957m, Early Years Block - £8.178m. This would mean a total funding amount of £108.794m.

Forum members noted that the High Needs Block had a predicted expenditure of £19.830m, which equated to £873,000 more than the allocation for that block. Again the Forum discussed in detail the twin issues of Special School and Out of Borough placements and noted that the data contained within the report suggested that in those two areas expenditure had increased by more than £3.5 million, or 50 per cent in four years.

A forecast was presented of the financial position of the High Needs Block over the next three years. This showed that, with the introduction of the new special free school, and given a number of assumptions about containing numbers in special schools and in the Pupil Referral Unit, the block could be in a break-even position within three years. However, a deficit on reserves of approximately £2m would have accumulated by this time, and would need to be repaid.

A discussion took place about the Chrysalis model that had had some success in Educational Diversity. This allowed a period of short-term intervention with pupils before they returned to a mainstream setting. Related to this, Forum members acknowledged

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that perhaps some schools had demonstrated a reluctance to integrate children back into their settings following pupils spending a period of time in a SERF or other form of specialist provision.

The future of funding for schools was discussed with concerns noted that the opening of the Armfield free school would have an impact on the number of places in neighbouring schools which could in turn impact levels of funding those settings would be eligible for. At a meeting with academy sponsors scheduled for 22 January 2018, it was suggested that the opportunity be taken to present the case for Academy schools to be held to greater account, especially in relation to their provision for pupils with additional needs and to ensure that everything possible would be done within schools before resorting to the use of outside placements.

The Forum agreed:

To note the provisional estimates for future use of Dedicated Schools Grant.

9 SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA 2018/2019 PROPOSALS

The Forum discussed items 8, 9 and 10 together as some of the recommendations outlined within each report contained elements of overlap especially in relation to subsequent decisions with financial implications.

The issue of future funding and ways to offset the current and future years' deficits were discussed in detail. Ultimately Forum members were faced with a number of dilemmas that meant the final solution would have to incorporate a number of compromises which could have a negative impact on those areas where funding might be reduced or reallocated.

Members highlighted that the local authority's proposals for the schools funding formula limited the amount of gains that schools would receive as a result of two factors: the proposed transfer of 0.5% of the Schools Block to the High Needs Block; and the necessity to fund estimated pupils at the new Armfield Free School from within the existing funding.

It was noted that the cap on gains set out in the paper at item 10 was set at 0.95%. However, the Department for Education had very recently notified local authorities of an error in the national dataset; when the formula was re-calculated with the corrected dataset, the cap could be set at 0.97%.

Mr Steve Thompson offered that, if schools were prepared to transfer 0.5% of the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, the local authority would match the amount of funding in order to help to offset pressures. This would equate to approximately £800,000 in total against the forecast deficit in 2018/19 of £873,000.

A discussion ensued regarding the £1m that is contributed from DSG to help fund school-based Children's Centres. It was noted that a commissioning review was underway to identify how provision can be best continued once the funding would no longer be available through DSG. A suggestion was put forward for this contribution to be reduced in 2018/19, however members agreed that this should be left intact until the review has run its course, with a view to reducing the contribution in future years.

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A suggestion was taken forward to form a working group to devise an action plan for the management of pressures on the High Needs Block.

The Forum agreed:

1. To agree to the use of Dedicated Schools Grant reserves (excluding school balances) to partially fund the high needs overspend in 2017-2018. (Item 8)
2. To agree to carry forward the forecast deficit balance to 2018-2019. (Item 8)
3. To note the provisional estimates for future use of Dedicated Schools Grant. (Item 9)
4. To agree to the local authority's proposal for the allocation of school funding in 2018/2019 as follows:
 - To transfer 0.5% of the total Schools Block funding to the High Needs Block.
 - Adopt the National Funding Formula values.
 - Set a minimum funding guarantee of 0.5%.
 - Set the mobility factor unit value at £624.
 - Set the capping and scaling levels at 0.97% and 100% respectively in order to facilitate moving to the national funding formula and ensure that the formula is affordable overall.
5. The Local Authority to match fund the transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, at approximately £400,000.
6. To form a working party comprised of schools representatives to produce a detailed action plan for the management of pressures on the High Needs Block to be formally submitted to the Director of Resources, Blackpool Council.

10 PUPIL GROWTH CONTINGENCY 2018/2019

Mr Sharples reported that under the Schools and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2017, Schools Forums could agree to set aside from Dedicated Schools Grant a specific contingency to support those schools that, with the prior agreement of the Local Authority, were permanently expanding.

The growth fund could only be used for the purposes of supporting growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need and must be available on the same basis for the benefit of both maintained schools and academies.

It was therefore requested that approval be given for the 2018/2019 level of Pupil Growth Contingency.

The Forum agreed:

To approve the value of the pupil growth contingency at £76,000 in 2018/2019, which had been allocated based on the October 2017 census data.

11 DE-DELEGATION OF SERVICES AND RETENTION FOR EDUCATION FUNCTIONS 2018/2019

Mr Paul Sharples, School Funding and Private Finance Initiative Manager outlined the proposal to continue to de-delegate funding in 2018/2019 related to free school meal eligibility checks, insurances, and Professional Teacher Association (PTA) facilities time, and also to continue to retain an amount from maintained schools in respect of education functions previously funded by the Education Services Grant.

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The Forum agreed:

1. That de-delegation be approved by maintained school representatives for 2018/2019 in respect of Free School Meal Eligibility Checks, Insurances, and Union Duties.
2. That funding be retained from maintained school schools, including primary, special and the pupil referral unit, in respect of education functions, previously funded by the Education Services Grant.

12 ILLUMINATE FUNDING

Mrs Wood reported that currently within the High Needs Block, an amount of £85,000 was set aside to support primary schools admitting new-to-area pupils who meet certain criteria and schools received a one-off payment of £2,000 in respect of eligible pupils. In 2016/2017, only £24,000 was spent, and a proposal was brought to the October 2017 meeting of Schools Forum to extend the fund to also cover secondary pupils. A set of criteria was proposed, but Schools Forum asked for the criteria across both primary and secondary to be reviewed to ensure consistency across the phases.

To this end, a working group containing representatives from both phases met in November 2017 to review the criteria, with support from the Local Authority. The recommendation of the group was that a one-off payment of £2,000 be made to schools which admitted a pupil onto their roll who met at least two criteria from a list they had devised.

It was noted that Illuminate funding would not be allocated in relation to the admission of permanently excluded students as this was covered within a separate funding stream. The funding would not be available for those with a full Education, Health and Care Plan. It would also not be available for Looked After Children who received a higher level of pupil premium funding which could be allocated to provide additional support.

The Forum agreed:

1. To approve the criteria for Illuminate funding set out in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.6 of the report.
2. To agree that the revised criteria should be applied retrospectively to eligible pupils admitted since September 2017.

13 DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION CONSULTATIONS - IMPACT OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT ON SCHOOL FUNDING

The Forum noted that on 16 November 2017, the DfE issued a consultation entitled "Eligibility for free school meals and the early years pupil premium under Universal Credit". This was followed on 4 December 2017 by a further consultation entitled "Free early years entitlement for 2 year olds under Universal Credit". It was reported that currently, eligibility for Free School Meals, Early Years Pupil Premium and the 2 year-old free entitlement depended on parents receiving certain benefits. As many benefits were being replaced by Universal Credit, the Government was reviewing the eligibility criteria.

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The first of the two consultations, which closed on 11 and 15 January respectively, proposed that children would be eligible to receive Free School Meals and Early Years Pupil Premium where the household income net of benefits was less than £7,400 p.a. The DfE estimated that an additional 50,000 children would be eligible under the new criteria compared to the current system. In the second consultation, the DfE proposed that children would be eligible for the 2-year old free entitlement where the household income net of benefits was less than £15,400 p.a.

It was proposed that the changes would come into effect from April 2018 for both sets of proposals. The Eligibility Checking System, which could be used to determine households' eligibility for Free School Meals and Early Years entitlements, would be updated to cater for the new eligibility criteria.

The Forum agreed:

To note the DfE's proposals for eligibility criteria relating to Universal Credit as it impacted on Early Years and Free School Meals (FSM).

14 DIRECTED REVISION OF SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS

The report explained the recent changes to Department for Education (DfE) guidance, following the outcome of the consultation issued on 15 November 2017, which were expected to be reflected in Blackpool's Scheme for Financing Schools with effect from the date of the DfE directed revision.

The Forum considered the proposed revised Scheme for Finance Blackpool Schools attached to the report as an Appendix in which the proposed changes had been highlighted.

The Forum agreed:

To note the revisions outlined in the report for incorporation in Blackpool's Scheme for Financing Schools (maintained schools representatives).

15 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the date of the next meeting would be Tuesday 13 March 2018.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 12.53 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
Chris Williams Democratic Governance Adviser
Tel: (01253) 477153
E-mail: chris.williams@blackpool.gov.uk