

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2017

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 C Butterworth, School Governor representative

Academy School Representatives

Ms J Carroll, Roseacre
Mr S Brennand, Unity
Ms T Harrison, Thames
Mr D Medcalf, St Georges
Mr N Toyne, Devonshire
Mrs S Wilson, Fylde Coast Academy Trust

Non-Schools Members

Mr D Dickinson, Staff/Teacher Associations
Mr R Rendell, Early Years Strategic Group
Ms S Hughes, Blackpool and Fylde College (post 16 representative)

In Attendance:

Mrs L Donkin, Consultant in Public Health
Mr M Golden, Finance Manager
Mr P Turner, Schools Safeguarding Adviser
Mr C Williams, Democratic Governance Adviser (Minutes)
Mrs H Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning, Mrs D Booth, Director of Children's Services, Mrs A Whitehead, Head of Schools, Standards and Effectiveness and Mr P Sharples, School Funding and PFI Manager.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 20 JUNE 2017

The minutes of the Schools Forum held on 20 June 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2017

4 REVIEW OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUTION

Mrs Wood described the context of the report. The Forum was advised that the Constitution required a review of membership at the first meeting of each academic year and that this should take into account the proportion of primary, secondary and academy representatives in order to ensure that the proportions remained representative of pupil numbers in each phase.

During the academic year 2017/2018, Mereside Primary School had converted to academy status. This was followed by Claremont Primary School converting to Westminster Primary Academy on 1 September 2017. Mrs Wood advised that the Forum distribution of the 11 mainstream primary, secondary and academy places did not require amending as a result of these changes. The only noted change the Forum was advised of was the replacement of Mr Cole Andrew with Ms Rosie Sycamore as the Special Schools representative.

The Forum thanked Mr Andrew for his service and dedication and wished him well for the future.

Mrs Wood advised that elections would be required to determine the membership for the next three year term of office from January 2018 and added that she would make the necessary arrangements.

The Forum agreed:

1. To agree the balance of representatives between primary, secondary and academy mainstream schools.
2. To agree to the continuation of arrangements in relation to the provisions in the Constitution in respect of numbers of representatives from any federation, multi-academy trust or academy sponsor.

5 PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

Mrs Donkin provided an update on Public Health initiatives that were of significance to schools. It was reported that an evaluation of the free school breakfast initiative had been carried out by a PhD student and was available for circulation to Forum members upon request. In addition, the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) which aimed to measure the height and weight of children in reception class (aged 4 to 5 years) and year 6 (aged 10 to 11 years) would be published prior to the next Forum meeting.

The Forum was advised that an interest group had been formed by Public Health and partners to discuss adverse childhood experiences with a view to developing a better understanding of the experiences of local children. Mrs Donkin welcomed Forum members to join the group if they wished.

The Forum noted the update.

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2017

6 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2017/2018

Mr Mark Golden presented the report detailing the current budget position of the Dedicated Schools Grant for the 2017/2018 Financial Year and the amount of Dedicated Schools Grant reserves as at 31 August 2017 along with details of future commitments.

The Forum expressed concern that the first report of the financial year had uncovered a serious error in the financial calculations for end of financial year 2016/2017. An error in the calculation of full time participation numbers from the part time equivalent data within the early years census, resulted in an over estimation of funding due for that year, which had in turn required an early years adjustment to reserves of £388,358.

The issue of Out Of Borough (OOB) placements was raised again as one of the key financial pressures on the DSG. Forum members emphasised the need to be more proactive and highlighted a lack of appropriate provision in mainstream settings currently, which continued to contribute significantly to exclusions and higher numbers in the Pupil Referral Unit, Special Schools and in OOB placements.

Mr Golden acknowledged that Blackpool's position was especially difficult given those pressures noted on the High Needs Block in particular and as such, presenting a balanced budget for 2018/2019 would present a significant challenge.

The Forum agreed:

1. To note the 2017/2018 budget position and resulting impact on the DSG reserve.
2. That the draft 2018/2019 Dedicated Schools Grant Budget proposal be brought to the 16 January 2018 Forum meeting.

7 SCHOOLS NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA UPDATE

Mrs Wood provided an update on the outcome of the second stage of the consultation by the Department for Education (DfE) regarding the introduction of a National School's Funding Formula and the implications for Blackpool.

It was reported that the second stage of the consultation was published on 14 December 2016, and ran for 14 weeks until 22 March 2017. Details of the proposals were shared with Schools Forum at its meeting in March 2017, and Blackpool Council subsequently submitted a response to the questions posed.

Mrs Wood advised that funding for 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 would be allocated using the national funding formula, but aggregated at Local Authority level. Local areas would then have the ability to re-distribute funding between their schools using a local formula (the "soft" formula). The "hard" formula would then come into effect in a future year. The local formula would help to smooth the impact of the introduction of the hard formula over the intervening years. Under the published Illustrative Budgets, Blackpool schools would stand to gain by 5.8% if the formula was fully implemented, with provisional gains of 2.5% in 2018/2019 after caps and floors had been calculated.

Concerns were noted that the operation of the prescribed Minimum Funding Guarantee might prevent schools from receiving the 0.5% per pupil increase allowed for in the national formula. Mrs Wood responded advising that a working group was being formed

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2017

to look at potential alternative local arrangements, which would require a request to disapply the standard minimum funding guarantee methodology. Local formulae have the flexibility to transfer up to 0.5% from the School's Block to another block. Given the current pressures on the High Needs Block, Mrs Wood advised that it may be necessary to consider this option in the short term.

One positive in particular was noted, namely that as a result of changes, the total amount spent through the looked-after children (LAC) factor in local formulae in 2017/2018 would be transferred from the DSG to the pupil premium plus budget. As a result of this transfer, the 2018/2019 pupil premium plus rate would then increase from £1,900 per pupil to £2,300 which would result in an estimated £150,000 of additional funding for Blackpool pupils on top of the national funding formula.

The Forum noted the timetable for next steps which included a workshop to be arranged for October 2017 to consider options for a local formula, followed by a Local Authority run consultation on the preferred option(s) in November 2017.

The Forum agreed:

1. To note the details of the Government's response to the second stage consultation for a national schools funding formula.
2. Proposals on the school funding formula for 2018/2019 to be presented to the Forum at the 16 January 2018 meeting.

8 HIGH NEEDS UPDATE

Mrs Wood reported that provisional allocations for 2018/2019 High Needs Block funding for local authorities had been proposed and the final policy document was fundamentally unchanged from the Stage 2 consultation proposals in the calculation of the national formula. Under the new proposals, Blackpool would see a £278,000 increase in funding in 2018/2019 against the 2017/2018 baseline, which would equate to 1.4 per cent. This compared to no increase in the Stage 2 proposals. The allocations contained two provisional amounts; the basic entitlement which would be updated to reflect more up-to-date pupil numbers from the October School Census; and the import/export adjustment which would be updated to reflect information from the January 2018 School Census and college Individualised Learner Record (ILR) returns. In future census returns, it was noted that there was a need to ensure accurate reporting of high needs numbers as underreporting could have an adverse effect on the amount of funding the Local Authority could potentially receive.

The Forum was reminded that with the ring-fencing of the Schools Block and pressures on Early Years providers, the opportunities for High Needs provision to be subsidised from elsewhere were reducing, and it was essential that a self-sustaining financial position be achieved in the near future. It was reported that the Local Authority would be producing a medium-term financial plan for the High Needs Block to achieve a balanced budget against available funding in the near future.

Following the outcome of a procurement exercise, a firm of external consultants, Premier Advisory Group, had been appointed to carry out a strategic review of high needs provision in Blackpool, funded by a Department for Education grant for this purpose.

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2017

The Forum discussed various aspects of High Needs provision and in particular the decision communicated to schools that ad hoc funding for pupils without an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) would no longer be available via the Statutory Assessment Resource Panel (SARP). Instead, schools would be expected to fund short-term support from their Notional SEN Budget and progress requests for statutory assessments in a timelier manner.

The Forum noted the report.

9 INCLUSION UPDATE

Following previously raised concerns about the number of pupils in the Pupil Referral Unit, as well as those being educated at home, the Forum considered the report which detailed a number of areas of progress relating to inclusion.

The subject of inclusion in schools had been the focus of attention in recent months through Blackpool's School Improvement Board and its Inclusion and Support Sub-Group. Mrs Wood advised that the Local Authority was in the process of engaging with schools to develop an inclusion strategy that would help to drive the agenda going forwards. An application to Round 1 of the Department for Education's Strategic Schools Improvement Fund had been unsuccessful, but Mrs Wood informed the Forum that further work was underway to consider additional applications to support inclusion in future rounds of the Improvement Fund and/or from available Opportunity Area funding.

A discussion about the In Year Fair Access Panel led to an expression of concern among some members about whether these were having any real impact on reducing numbers in the Pupil Referral Unit. However, some called for a similar arrangement to be in place for primaries as currently the Panel only dealt with secondary cases. Ms Harrison agreed to attend the next Panel in order to bring a Primary perspective to proceedings and ensure consistency of approach.

Further discussion about underuse of Illuminate funding for new to area pupils suggested that perhaps the eligibility criteria were not widely understood. A review of 2017/2018 movement into primaries was seen as an important step to establish whether any eligible children had missed out on funding. A proposal to extend Illuminate funding to cover Secondary pupils was discussed. Forum members felt that the funding criteria should be reviewed across both phases.

Mrs Wood reported that changes to the referral system into the Pupil Referral Unit had resulted in the Local Authority reaching an agreement with the Head Teacher of Educational Diversity that all referrals into the PRU would now be made via the School Admissions Team. The only exception to this would be where pupils met the strict medical criteria for placement in the Athena Unit, and were referred via its Panel.

The Forum agreed:

1. To agree that the charging for permanently excluded pupils be pro rata on an academic year for primary academies, in line with the agreement already made by secondary academies.
2. To operate a single In Year Fair Access (IYFA) Panel for both Primary and Secondary schools and invite Primary representatives to join the membership.

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2017

3. For the joint IYFA Panel, once formalised, to review Primary and Secondary schools allocation criteria for Illuminate funding to better align them.
4. A report on the review at 3. to be brought to the 16 January 2018 meeting.
5. To review movement into Primary schools in 2017/2018 to establish if any children had missed out on Illuminate funding and if so to allocate funding retrospectively from April 2017.

10 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PUPIL PREMIUM GRANT

Mrs Wood presented the report which included a proposal for the Virtual Head Teacher to retain a portion of Pupil Premium Plus for Looked After Children in Blackpool, namely an amount of £225 per pupil to centrally fund: extension of the Letterbox Reading Scheme at a cost of £13,000, introducing GCSE Pod at £9,550 for 50 licences, funding the JustUz/Corporate Parent Achievement Awards for £5,000, providing extra Educational Psychology support at a cost of £7,000, paying £15,000 for an additional part-time Pupil Achievement Support Officer and funding Connexions Support at a cost of £35,000.

The Forum was advised that the proposal had been discussed and agreed at the Education Managers' Meeting on 8 September 2017. Based on the current Pupil Premium Plus numbers of 381 (as of July 2017) this would total £85,725. Schools would continue to access the remaining funding through an application process aligning planned spending with targets on Personal Education Plans (PEP) and demonstrating impact of previous funding. In addition, Pupil Premium Plus would be distributed three times per year as currently in roughly equal instalments.

During the subsequent discussion, it was agreed that duplication of services should be avoided and some representatives advised that they currently provided some of the services internally within school and from their individual budgets, for example careers advice. With this in mind, the Forum expressed a desire to find out what exactly individual settings currently provided for their Looked After Children. In addition, concerns about the separate issue of non-attendance of social workers to some meetings within schools about specific Looked After Children were noted.

The Forum agreed:

Mrs Wood to feed back the comments of Forum members to the Virtual School Head Teacher.

11 ACADEMY UPDATE

Mr Paul Turner reported that Stanley Primary School had taken the decision to join the Mulberry Academy Trust, with Norbreck Primary Academy as the lead school, from 1 April 2018.

The Forum was also advised that Claremont Primary School had completed its conversion to Westminster Primary Academy and Children's Centre on 1 September 2017.

The Forum noted the update.

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2017

12 LOCAL AUTHORITY UPDATE

The Forum was advised that there had been some increased buyback from the Local Authority for Pupil Welfare Services to individual school settings. In addition, St Cuthbert's had recently been given a 'good' rating in an Ofsted inspection. Members of the Forum were also informed that Mr Phil Thompson had been permanently appointed as the Head of SEND for the Local Authority.

All Primary and Secondary school headteachers were invited to a consultation on Inclusion that would be conducted at Bickerstaffe House on 9 /10 November 2017.

Mr Turner reported that following discussions at the School Improvement Board, the decision had been taken to reduce the number of meetings by disbanding the various Sub-Groups and reorganising the Board itself to increase functionality and productivity.

The Forum noted the update.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the date of the next meeting would be Tuesday 16 January 2018.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 12.00 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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