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MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 7 MARCH 2023

Present:

In Attendance:

Academy / Free School Representative

Abrar Hussain, Highfield (Star)
Roger Farley, Westminster (FCAT)
Tracy Harrison, Thames / Roseacre (ATC)
Matt McIver, St George's / Baines Endowed (Cidari)

Maintained Special School Representative

Neill Oldham, Highfurlong

Special Academy / Free Schools Representative

Gill Hughes, Park Community Academy

Maintained Primary School Headteachers / representative

Claire Taylor St Nicholas

Early Years Representative

Rachel Dey, Pebbles Day Nursery

Non-school members

Neil Adams, Unison
Amanda Baines, Staff/Teacher associations

In attendance

Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services
Darren Maddocks, Strategic Management Accountant.
Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services
Tyrone Wassell, Democratic Governance Advisor
Hilary Wood, Head of School Finance and Funding

1 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Roger Farley welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Apologies were received from;
Councillor Gillian Campbell (Cabinet Member for Inclusion, Youth, Schools and Transience)

Edward Vitalis (Vice Chair, and Academy Representative Marton / South Shore (Bright Futures)), Elaine Allen (St John Vianney), Graeme Dow, (Free School Representative), Jill Gray (Blackpool Sixth Form College), Michelle Lonican (Our Lady), Victoria O'Farrell (Education Diversity).

Charlotte Baron (Head of SEND), Mark Golden (Head of Accountancy, Deputy S151 Officer).

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2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest noted at the meeting.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 17 JANUARY 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 17 January 2023 were considered and agreed as an accurate record.

4 LOCAL AUTHORITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE

Paul Turner, Assistant Director, Children's Services, presented the Local Authority Update to the Forum. The item informed the Forum of recent changes that had occurred

Mr. Turner spoke about national statistics relating to attendance, he informed the Forum that there had not been a significant change since the previous meeting on 17 January 2023. Elective Home Education had increased since January 2023, with 27% of those in Elective Home Education in year 11. However visits to those in receipt of Elective Home Education had stayed high within the Lancashire area. The Forum also noted that permanent exclusions had also increased.

Mr. Turner went on to explain that attendance nationally had been poor, the attendance figures for primary schools were performing better than those of secondary schools and suspensions had also increased. Mr. Turner expanded on the issues around attendance by informing the Forum in broad terms that an area's affluence appeared to correlate to attendance.

The Forum asked a question about the effect of increasing numbers of permanent exclusions on Safety Valve plans. Mr. Turner advised that it was not currently anticipated that spend would be in excess of budgets, and that planned numbers had been reduced in line with latest forecasts.

5 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2022/23

Darren Maddocks, Strategic Management Accountant, presented a report to the Forum, updating attendees on the forecast position of the 2022-23 Dedicated Schools Grant budget as of 31 January. Mr Maddocks also reported on the amount of Dedicated Schools Grant reserves forecast as at 31 January.

Mr Maddocks informed the Forum that, according to the budget monitoring as of the end of January 2023, the Dedicated Schools Grant budget had been forecast with a £573k under spend against a budgeted under spend of £1,608k, with a variance of £1,035k to plan.

The major in-year variances were:

- Out of Borough placements demand higher than budget of £256k.
- Special School placements pressure of £238k.
- Resource provision pressure of £159k relating to additional pupils at Marton and Thames.
- Post 16 Education placements pressure of £71k.
- Mainstream Top-up pressure of £249k.

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The statement of forecast reserves which had been attached at Appendix 5b to the agenda showed that the £573k surplus would reduce the brought forward deficit of £4.956m to £4.383m by 31st March 2023. The statement excluded the maintained schools reserves of £4.129m.

Mr Turner explained that, with the state of the budget as it had been reported to the Forum at the meeting, provision had been made in future years allowing for pro-active spending choices in areas which required investment. These spending choices and investments would allow the sector to be in a much stronger position in roughly three years' time.

Action

Hilary Wood and Paul Turner to develop proposals for future allocation of available inclusion funding and present them to the next meeting on 20 June 2023.

6 SAFETY VALVE UPDATE

Hilary Wood, Head of School Finance and Funding, presented a report updating the Forum on the Safety Valve programme, the report presented had informed The Forum of any recent updates on the Safety Valve programme.

Mrs Wood was positive about how the Safety Valve programme was performing.

It had been reported at the 17 January 2023 meeting that Blackpool, along with many other areas around the country, was experiencing financial pressures on the High Needs Budget. Additional government funding in recent years had previously helped to offset some of the pressures, however costs in 2021/22 exceeded the High Needs funding allocation by £2.374 million. Transfers from other funding blocks, together with a release of the new and growing schools provision would be combined to offset pressures, with the cumulative deficit against Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) having reduced by £805k to £4.957 million at the end of March 2022.

Despite an increase in the High Needs funding for 2022/23, ongoing pressures had meant that forecasted costs were exceeding income, resulting in an estimated overspend of £494k for the year 2022/23. However, approved transfers from other Dedicated Schools Grant blocks looked set to bring about a net repayment of £573k, which would reduce the cumulative deficit to an estimated £4.383 million in March 2023.

Blackpool had formed part of the Department for Education's (DfE) Safety Valve programme in 2022/23, a programme which had been designed to provide aid to Local Authorities with the highest percentage Dedicated School Grant deficits. The programme required Local Authorities to develop plans for reform to their High Needs systems and associated spending. The Department for Education provided support and challenge to Local Authorities who participated in the Safety Valve programme, the scope of which was to rapidly place these local authorities on a more sustainable footing.

The Local Authority had been developing the Safety Valve proposals and the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan in consultation with stakeholders, and had received the support of Schools Forum at its meeting in 17 January 2023. On 26 January 2023, the Local Authority presented these proposals to the Department for Education's Safety Valve

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team. A summary of the proposals were:

1. To reduce the number of pupils in independent special schools through the expansion of local specialist provision
2. Continue to increase the proportion of pupils with Education Health and Care Plans in mainstream school
3. Tighten management of demand and funding for Education Health and Care Plan
4. Rationalise Pupil Referral Unit estate and reduce budget in line with lower numbers

The key requests from the Department for Education were:

- A contribution of £3.876m towards writing off the historic Dedicated School Grant deficit.
- A total of £6.153m in capital funding for three schemes that underpin actions in the DSG Management Plan. Use of £190k of funding in 2023/24 to prioritise statutory assessment work.

Since the meeting, the Safety Valve agreement between Blackpool Council and the Department for Education had been signed and published on 16 March 2023. The agreement included a contribution of £3.876m towards deficit write-off, to be paid to Blackpool Council in instalments over the life of the DSG Management Plan. Payments would be subject to compliance with the conditions of the Safety Valve agreement, most notably adherence to the plan for repayment of the DSG deficit. The outcome of the bid for capital funding had not yet been notified but an update will be presented at the next meeting, 20 June 2023.

7 EARLY YEARS FUNDING 2023/24

Hilary Wood, Head of School Finance and Funding, presented a report to the Forum, which required a vote by school and Early Years members.

The Schools Forum considered the Local Authority's proposed formula for Early Years funding for three- and four-year old early education, as well as the value of the Inclusion Fund for 2023/24, and the funding rate for two-year olds.

Three- and four-year old funding rates

The Department for Education (DfE) had announced an increase in the three- and four-year old funding rates for Blackpool of 23p per child per hour for 2023/24. The overall funding rate has risen to £4.67 from £4.44 in 2022/23. The local authority proposed to pass through the full amount of the government increase to Early Years providers through the single funding formula, meaning that the overall hourly Base Rate would increase by a total of 23p per child per hour. This would bring the Base Rate up to £4.59 per hour for 2023/24, compared to £4.36 in 2022/23.

Funding that had previously been allocated to maintained schools and academies with nursery provision to support increased costs associated with teachers pay and pension costs via additional grants (Teacher's Pay Grant and Teacher's Pension Employer

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Contribution Grant) had been included within the three- and four-year old Early Years National Funding Formula from 2023/24. The provisional allocation for 2023/24 had been confirmed as £118,000, which closely mirrored the funding received in 2022/23 by schools and academies with nursery provision. It was proposed that this funding be apportioned amongst school nurseries via a new teachers' pay and pension grants supplement of 28p per hour.

Early Years Inclusion Fund

The Forum was presented with information on the Early Years Inclusion Fund, it was proposed that the Inclusion Fund contribution from the Early Years block would be maintained at £60k in 2023/24, which would equate to an average of 4p per hour across all providers. Due to increased demand, a further £30k would continue to be allocated from the high needs block resulting in an overall total of £90k.

Two-year old funding rates

Hilary Wood informed the Forum that Government funding available for eligible two year olds had increased by 6p to £5.63 per child per hour for 2023/24, from £5.57 in 2022/23. The Local Authority intended to pass through the full amount of the Government increase to Early Years providers, and to supplement this with a further 3p per hour, which would be achieved by a reduction in funding retained for central costs. The provider rate would be increased to £5.48 in 2023/24, compared to £5.39 in 2022/23.

Action

Hilary Wood to consider how budget statements to providers can be issued earlier in future years make contact with school liaisons and report back to the forum in the latter part of the year for the 10 October 2023 meeting.

Resolved:

1. To agree the Local Authority's proposed formula for Early Years funding for three- and four-year old early education as outlined in paragraphs 3.3 to 3.7 of the report at item 7 of the Agenda.
2. To agree to set aside from the Early Years block at a rate of 4p per hour, equating to approximately £60k per year
3. To note the local authority's funding rate for two year olds at £5.48 per hour.

8 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET UPDATE 2023/24

Hilary Wood presented the Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Update 2023/24. Full details of the approved budget had been included in Appendix 7a for the agenda for the Schools Forum meeting on 17 January 2023, in which Schools Forum received details of the local authority's proposed budget for Dedicated Schools Grant in 2023/24. The budget had been approved by full Council on 22 February 2023. A small number of adjustments to the already approved budget had been made, with details set out at Appendix 8a of the agenda for the meeting of the Schools Forum on 7 March 2023, and explanations as follows:

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- Increase in school business rates

An increase in Local Schools Budget and a decrease in transfer to growth contingency of £63,441 related to school business rates. The mainstream school funding formula for 2023/24, which had been presented to Schools Forum at the meeting on 17 January 2023 had incorporated estimates for business rates based on costs in 2022/23. However, from April 2023 revaluations of all properties in England will come into effect, and the Education and Skills Funding Agency had requested that revised estimates be built into Blackpool's formula for 2023/24. While academy schools claimed their rates costs from the Education and Skills Funding Agency, the increased funding for maintained schools had lagged and would be paid by way of an adjustment to Dedicated Schools Grant in 2024/25. In order that funding for individual schools would not be impacted by this technical adjustment, the amount which had been set aside in the growth contingency would be reduced to £231,246.

- De-delegation and Education Functions

The amounts relating to de-delegation and retention of funding for education functions had been quantified and shown as separate amounts, with a corresponding reduction to the Local Schools Budget line.

- Central Schools Services Block

An unallocated amount of £36,696 had been split across the expenditure lines in this block, in line with estimates of costs in 2023/24.

- Early Years Block

The value of the Early Years Inclusion Fund and costs relating to central expenditure have been discussed with the Early Years Strategic Provider Group and are now shown as separate lines on the budget statement, with corresponding reductions to the Early Years grants lines. The details of this block had been discussed in Agenda Item 7 of the meeting 17/03/2023.

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 20 June 2023

10 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The Glossary for this meeting 07 March 2023 is attached at Appendix 10a.

Chairman

(The meeting ended 10.03 am)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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