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MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2023

Present:

Academy / Free School Representative

Roger Farley Roseacre ATC
Abrar Hussain Highfield, Star
Jane McCumiskey, FCAT
Laura Watts, Sea View Trust
Caroline Boothroyd, Hawes Side Academy

Maintained Primary School Headteachers / representative

Jonathan Clucas, Layton Primary School
Claire Taylor, St Nicholas C of E Primary School

Pupil Referral Unit

Victoria O'Farrell, Educational Diversity

Early Years Representative

Lucy Cross, Kincaig

Staff/Teacher Associations

Amanda Baines, National Education Union
Charlotte Walker, Unison

In Attendance:

Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services
Darren Maddocks, Strategic Management Accountant
Kim Wood, Household Support and Deprivation Lead
Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services
Tyrone Wassell, Democratic Governance Advisor

Apologies:

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Young People and Aspiration
Charlotte Baron, Head of SEND
Matt McIver, Cidari
Neil Adams, Unison

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Paul Turner, Assistant Director for Children's Services welcomed members of the Schools Forum to the meeting

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

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3 ELECTION OF CHAIR

The Schools Forum considered the election of a Chair of the Schools Forum until August 2024

Resolved:

To elect Roger Farley as Chair of the Schools Forum until August 2024

4 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

Roger Farley took the Chair from this point onwards.

The Schools Forum considered the election of a Vice Chair of the Schools Forum until August 2024.

Resolved:

To elect Jonathan Clucas as Vice Chair of the Schools Forum until August 2024.

5 POWERS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND GOOD PRACTICE OF SCHOOLS FORUMS

Paul Turner, Assistant Director for Children's Services, presented the report which reminded members of the powers and responsibilities of Schools Forums. There had been no changes since the previous year however the report was presented as an annual reminder of those areas which the Schools Forum could decide upon and those which remained as local authority decisions on which the Forum was consulted.

It was recognised that to be an effective partnership between the local authority and the parties involved in Blackpool's education system the Forum had to work collaboratively, providing challenge and scrutiny where appropriate and that openness and honesty were key

6 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 20 JUNE 2022

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 20 June 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

7 REVIEW OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUTION

Paul Turner Assistant Director of Children's Services, presented the report and explained that an annual review of the constitution of the Schools Forum was required in accordance with the existing constitution. The review should take into account the balance of primary, secondary and academy representatives to ensure that the proportions remained representative. The final decision on membership remained with the local authority however the Forum was consulted on its views and recommendations. No changes were proposed to the Schools Forum Constitution or Terms of Reference. Following a brief discussion the Forum agreed to recommend that the local authority retained the existing balance of representatives between maintained primary and academy mainstream schools. It further agreed to support the continuation of arrangements in relation to provisions in the Constitution in respect of numbers of representatives from any federation, multi-academy trust or academy sponsor.

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The Forum were informed that Mr Edward Vitalis - Bright Futures had resigned from the Schools Forum meaning that there was space for a new Academy Representative to sit on the Forum.

Action:

Democratic Governance Advisor to approach Academy Schools to appoint a new Academy Schools Forum Member. This would be reported at the next meeting.

8 LOCAL AUTHORITY UPDATE

Paul Turner Assistant Director of Children's Services, provided a verbal update to the members of the Schools Forum. 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 20 June 2023. The numbers of children in the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) had remained much the same, there had been a slight increase in the number of children in Elective Home Education however the increase in Elective Home Education is to be expected at the start of the academic year.

Mr Turner went on to explain that the number of permanent exclusions from schools had increased since the previous year.

Mr Turner informed the Forum that a replacement Head of School Funding and Finance would be expected to be in place by June 2024.

9 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2023/24

Darren Maddocks, Strategic Management Accountant presented a report to the Schools Forum around the Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Monitoring,

It was reported that the budget monitoring to the end of August 2023 had been forecasting an under spend of £690,000 against a budgeted under spend of £690,000, a break-even position. This excluded any Safety Value receipts from the Department for Education. The report presented to the Forum was an amended version of the report that had been shared at the March 2023 Schools Forum. An adjustment had been made to reduce the Pupil Growth Contingency from the original budget of £295,000 to nil. Mr Maddocks went on to explain that this was partly as a result of the business rates adjustment of £64,000 reported to Schools Forum in March 2023, but also as a result of a further error in the local funding formula notified by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) since the last meeting. Funding of £270,000 had been over-allocated to schools through the formula for 2023/24

To help mitigate the impact of this adjustment on schools the Education and Skills Funding Agency had agreed that the error be rectified through a reduction the Pupil Growth Contingency by the remaining £231,000, with the balance of £39,000 being adjusted against the 2024/25 Dedicated Schools Grant allocation.

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Mr Maddocks brought the Forum's attention to other major in-year variances which were as follows:

- An under spend on Special School Top Up relating to commissioned places
- An under spend on Pupil Referral Unit Top up relating to additional income from schools.
- An over spend on Mainstream School Top Up due to increased demand.
- An under spend on Post-16 Education due to lower placement costs than anticipated.
- An over spend on Out of Borough placements due to a higher demand than budgeted.

Mr Maddocks also spoke to the Forum about the statement of forecast reserves which had set out Budget monitoring for the 2023/24 Financial Year and had been forecasting a £690,000 surplus, along with the Safety Valve funding of £470,000 this would reduce the deficit of £2,785,000 to £1,625,000 by 31 March 2024. This excluded the maintained schools reserves of £3,648,000.

The Forum questioned Mr. Maddocks about the overspend on mainstream schools and queried if more children had been going into mainstream schools, Mr. Maddocks informed the Forum that there had not been any significant shift in the numbers of pupils going into Mainstream Schools.

Mr. Paul Turner informed the Forum that there had been an error in funding from the Department for Education (DFE), this error equated to a loss of £960,000 in funding however Mr. Turner provided reassurance to the board that this loss of funding would not create a significant impact on current funding formulae.

10 SAFETY VALVE UPDATE

Mr. Paul Turner, Assistant Director, Children's Service's presented the update on the Safety Valve Programme to the Schools Forum, the monitoring reports shared with the agenda had shown that several conditions of the Safety Valve agreement had been met at the time of the meeting, key performance indicator data showed positive progress towards the targets for years 2023/24. A delayed announcement of capital funding by the Department for Education had led to an adjustment of the capital programme to align with capacity and timescales to deliver schemes, but the Local Authority remained confident that this will have a negligible impact on the ability to meet the deficit recovery targets.

Additional Government funding in recent years had helped to offset some of the pressures on the High Needs block. Blackpool is now in a position where it is reducing the cumulative deficit on the DSG. The in-year surplus of £621,000 compares favourably with the projection within the DSG Management Plan for the deficit to reduce by £394,000 in 2022/23. No information had come to light to suggest that the planned deficit reduction for 2023/24, cannot be achieved. Mr Turner informed the Forum that budgeting had been successful in financially securing planned future deficit reduction.

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11 SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA 2024/25

Mr Darren Maddocks, Strategic Management Accountant presented the Schools Funding Formula to the forum to vote on.

The report recommended that the Forum support the Local Authority's proposals for the allocation of school funding in 2024/25 the proposals were:

- **Continued application of the National Funding Formula (NFF) unit values;**

Blackpool's Primary Unit of Funding had been set at £5,303, and the Secondary Unit of Funding had been set at £7,269.

The majority of the NFF formula factors values would increase by 2.4%, with the free school meals factor increased by 1.6%. Premises funding would continue to be allocated at local authority level based on actual spend in the 2023/24 local formula, with an inflationary increase for the Private Finance Initiative factor only.

- **A minimum set funding guarantee of 0.5% per pupil funding;**

The Minimum Per Pupil Funding levels, which are mandatory in local funding formulae, will increase to £4,655 for primary schools, and £6,050 for secondary schools.

- **Transfer any surplus from the growth funding allocation into the growth funding contingency.**

- **to approve the transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block by way of a reduction to the Basic Entitlement**

The Local Authority launched a consultation on proposals for the 2024/25 schools funding formula on 8 September 2023. This year, the review has focused on the single matter of a proposed transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. Following the close of the consultation on 22 September 2023 the majority of the schools that responded to the consultation showed support of the 0.5% transfer

Action

Darren Maddocks to produce The Local Authority's draft 2024/25 Schools Funding formula in advance of the Schools Forum in January 2024 before individual school budgets are issued before the end of February 2024.

Resolved

1)The Schools Forum Voted to approve of the Local Authority's proposals for the allocation of school funding in 2024/25

2)The Schools Forum Voted to approve the transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block by way of a reduction to the Basic Entitlement

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12 EXPANSION OF FUNDED CHILDCARE

Lucy Cross, Deputy Head Teacher, Kincaig Primary School and Children's Centre, presented the new childcare entitlements which had been announced for working parents, the report outlined the following

- From April 2024 all working parents of 2 year olds would be able to access 15 hours per week
- From September 2024 all working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3 years would be able to access 15 hours per week
- From September 2025 all working parents aged 9 months up to 3 years would be able to access 30 hours childcare per week

The Government budget had also announced an uplift in the funding rates from September 2023 via a new Early Years Supplementary Grant. Local authorities are expected to pass the uplift through in full to Early Years settings:

3 and 4 year olds

Current provider base rate excluding supplements £4.59 per hour

An increase of £0.37 per hour

Revised provider rate excluding supplements £4.96 per hour

An increase of 8.4%

The actual percentage increase would vary per provider due to supplement rates for deprivation, quality and teachers pay and pensions.

2 year olds

Current provider base rate £5.48 per hour

Increase £1.63 per hour

Revised provider rate £7.11 per hour

Increase 29%

Early Years pupil premium

Additional 4p per hour, meaning 66p per hour per child

Disability Access Fund

Annual increase from £828 to £881

The proposed new formula followed the current formula for 3 and 4 year olds with minimal change. Deprivation supplements would also apply to children aged two and below.

The Forum noted that the maximum of grant funding that could be retained by local authorities to cover their own expenses for administration of the grant would be capped at 3%.

Resolved

To note the update regarding the expansion of funded childcare

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Chairman

(The meeting ended 10.00 am)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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