

# Public Document Pack

## MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2021

### **Present:**

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

Ms H Moreton, Holy Family

#### **Primary Governor**

Ms M Lonicon, Our Lady

#### **Special School Academy Representative**

Ms G Hughes, Park (Sea View)

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

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 A Hussain, Highfield (Star Academies)

Mr M McIver, St George's/Baines Endowed (Cidari)

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

#### **Pupil Referral Unit**

Ms V O'Farrell, Educational Diversity

#### **Post-16**

Ms J Gray, Blackpool Sixth Form

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

Mr N Adams, UNISON

Ms A Baines, Staff/Teacher Associations

#### **In Attendance:**

Councillor J Hobson, Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Schools

Mr D Maddocks, Senior Accountant

Mr P Turner, Assistant Director – School Improvement and SEND

Ms E Valentine, School Funding Officer

Mrs H Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources

Mr A Kowzan, Education and Skills Funding Agency (Observer)

Mrs D Bowater, Democratic Governance Adviser (minutes)

### **1 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

Hilary Wood welcomed attendees to the meeting prior to the election of the Chair at item 2. New attendees including Councillor Jim Hobson (Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Schools), Abrar Hussain (Highfield and Star Academies), Victoria O'Farrell (Education Diversity) and Emma Valentine (School Funding Officer) were welcomed to the meeting.

It was noted that an observer from the Education and Skills Funding Agency, Alekander Kowzan, was in attendance at the meeting.

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Apologies for absence were received from Elaine Allen (St John Vianney), Neill Oldham (Highfurlong), Rachel Dey (Early Years), Angela Wellings (Interim Head of SEND), Victoria Gent (Director of Children's Services) and Mark Golden (Finance Manager).

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest noted at the meeting.

### 3 ELECTION OF CHAIR

The Forum considered the election of a Chairman of the Schools Forum until August 2022.

**Resolved:**

- **The Forum elected Roger Farley (Westminster (FCAT) Academy School Representative) as Chairman of the Schools Forum until August 2022.**

### 4 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

Having been elected, Roger Farley took the role of Chair from this point of the meeting. The Forum considered the election of a Vice Chairman of the Schools Forum until August 2022.

**Resolved:**

- **The Forum elected Edward Vitalis (South Shore / Marton (Bright Futures) Academy School Representative) as Vice Chairman of the Schools Forum until August 2022.**

### 5 POWERS RESPONSIBILITIES AND GOOD PRACTICE OF SCHOOLS FORUMS

(Matt McIver and Jill Gray arrived during this item)

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources presented the report to remind members of the powers and responsibilities of Schools Forums. Members were requested to note the powers and responsibilities of a Schools Forum and to consider the characteristics of an effective relationship between the Schools Forum and the local authority.

The main powers and responsibilities outlined by the Department for Education included aspects that Schools Forum must be consulted on and those that they are able to decide on.

It was recognised that Schools Forum were consulted on changes to the Schools Formula, the minimum funding guarantee in schools formula, changes to the early years formula, and financial arrangements for pupils with SEND, in Alternative Provision and for Early Years provision.

It was further reported that Schools Forum must decide on financial movements from the Schools Block to other blocks up to 0.5%, on central spend and criteria for pupil growth and falling rolls, on other central spend, on de-delegation and education functions (maintained schools only), on the Scheme for Financing Schools (maintained schools only) and on the

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Election of chair and voting procedures.

It was noted that the Operational and Good Practice Guidance outlined some features that local authorities and Schools Forums should consider to make Schools Forums as effective as possible. The characteristics of effective relationships included challenge and scrutiny, partnership, effective support, openness, responsiveness and a strategic view.

It was recognised that the relationship between the local authority and Schools Forum had to be a partnership and provide effective support as well as presenting challenge and scrutiny. It was suggested that holding meetings virtually was less conducive to promoting discussion and debate than in-person meetings were.

Questions and comments were welcomed.

One member asked whether the Schools Forum were fulfilling the duties as required if the group were to be self-assessed and queried whether there was enough challenge. In response, Hilary Wood confirmed that the Schools Forum were undertaking their role as required but more discussion would be welcomed and suggested that face-to-face meetings might promote this.

Paul Turner commented that the emphasis should be placed on the whole budget and the impact decisions have on the budget as a whole. It was illustrated that where there was a deficit on the High Needs block, this would affect all of the school budgets as a collective. He urged members to acknowledge that the effect on schools was apparent and should be discussed through questions and debate.

It was further suggested that the reports could also highlight the impact on the total funds where a decision was taken on one aspect such as the High Needs block.

### 6 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 15 June 2021 were considered and agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising from the minutes:

**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 no funds were available therefore it was agreed to close the item.

**Discussion on SEND budgets to be scheduled for a Schools Forum meeting in early 2022** – It was noted that there were a number of items relating to SEND support including Early Help which were being reviewed and a more detailed overview would be presented to either the January 2022 or March 2022 Schools Forum meeting.

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### 7 REVIEW OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUTION

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources presented the report as the Schools Forum were required to review the membership each academic year. It was noted that the review should consider the proportion of primary, secondary and academy representatives in order to ensure that the proportions remained representative of pupil numbers in each phase.

The Schools Forum were asked to agree to the balance of representatives between primary, secondary and academy mainstream schools and agree to 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. It was reported that since the membership was last reviewed, there had been no further conversions of maintained schools to academies.

It was reported that in October 2014, Schools Forum agreed to relax constraints on federations, multi academy trusts and academy sponsors. The constitution now contained provisions to allow federations, multi-academy trusts or academy sponsors representing three or more schools in Blackpool to nominate up to two members of Forum. It was proposed that these provisions be retained.

No amendments to the constitution or terms of reference were proposed.

Questions and comments were welcomed.

It was commented that there was a drop in primary schools numbers. Hilary Wood acknowledged that primary school numbers had decreased however some primary school numbers would also be factored into Academy numbers, although it was apparent that the birth rate had decreased. In response it was also recognised that where there was a drop in school numbers, there would be a drop in funds allocated to schools.

Following discussion, it was agreed that no changes were required to the balance of representatives and the constitution.

#### **Resolved:**

- **The balance of representatives between primary, secondary and academy mainstream schools was unchanged.**
- **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 was unchanged.**

### 8 LOCAL AUTHORITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE

Paul Turner, Assistant Director for School Improvement and SEND presented the report to provide an overview of recent developments within the local authority. The report outlined that as schools had re-opened, a high percentage of attendance was reported. In relation to

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cases of covid-19 within schools, cases were low but increasing within school settings.

It was reported that Opportunity Area Year five was underway, with a number of programmes related to inclusion, literacy and careers being funded for a further year. The Literacy Strategy was launched at a well-attended event in September 2021. Also in September 2021 the Chef's Academy launched at Highfield Day Centre for those aged 14 to 16 years.

In relation to SEND, the draft SEND strategy was expected by the end of November 2021 and the SEND banding consultation process was ongoing. It was reported that use of The Oracle building for Park sixth form students was planned.

It was reported that there were three permanent exclusions noted in the secondary phase. Numbers at the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) were low at 118 and numbers accessing Elective Home Education (EHE) were considered high at 315.

It was noted that Blackpool Community Football Club Trust opened their independent school at the football stadium in September 2021, expanding the Alternative Provision offer in Blackpool with commissioned places at The Alternative School noted as low, but still necessary.

Questions and comments were welcomed.

It was asked what pressures were placed on the budget as the Elective Home Education (EHE) numbers were so high. In response, Paul Turner outlined that the EHE impacted on the High Needs block, particularly with reference to place plans and funding. When children were not educated in schools, the funds were not allocated to schools. Some funding for supporting EHE was from the Opportunity Area.

### **9 DSG BUDGET MONITORING 2021 - 2022**

In the absence of Mark Golden, Darren Maddocks, Senior Accountant presented the report to outline the budget position of the 2021-22 Dedicated Schools Grant as at 31 August 2021 and the amount of Dedicated Schools Grant reserves as at 31 August 2021.

It was reported that the budget monitoring to the end of August 2021 was forecasting a £711k overspend against a deficit budget of £326k. Therefore, the total in-year shortfall was estimated at £1.037m. Added to the brought forward deficit of £5.766m, the resulting forecast DSG deficit by 31 March 2022 was £6.803m. The figures excluded the maintained schools reserves (£3.919m) and the specific Union Fees reserve (£44k).

The main pressures were identified as Post-16 placements with a demand of £209k being higher than budgeted. The overspend on Access and Inclusion was £115k, relating to increased costs for the Oracle building (£29k), and the extension of resilience coaches as approved at a previous Schools Forum (£86k). Special schools placement growth totalled £93k and exceptional circumstances costs were higher than budgeted by £91k.

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Questions and comments were welcomed.

One member asked what the longer term impact of the deficit was on schools. In response, Darren Maddocks indicated that a five year plan was in development looking at both numbers and unit costs to gain a more sophisticated view. Each DSG area was considered and the expensive ones viewed on how to reduce the associated costs. A lot of work was being undertaken and a forecast would be brought to the next meeting. Following this, there was a request that the paper focused on the quality of provision as well as the efficiency of the provision.

It was further commented that over the years, Schools Forum discussion surrounded how to cut the services and make savings and this was frustrating for members.

### **Action:**

- **Future papers on DSG monitoring to consider the quality of provision as well as the efficiency of the provision.**

### **10 HIGH NEEDS UPDATE**

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources presented the report to update on the latest developments relevant to the High Needs budget.

As reported in previous meetings, Blackpool, along with many other areas around the country, was experiencing financial pressures on its High Needs Budget. In order to better understand Blackpool's financial position, a medium-term financial plan had been developed to monitor forecast expenditure against the High Needs Budget, and factor in predictions of where savings may be achievable.

It was noted that despite additional government funding in 2020/21 and 2021/22, pupil numbers in high cost placements continued to rise. Latest forecasts showed costs in 2021/22 would exceed the High Needs funding allocation by around £2 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 £1 million this year, reaching £6.8 million by March 2022, the equivalent to approximately 5% of the total DSG.

It was also noted that the provisional allocation of High Needs funding for 2022/23 had been announced, being the third and final year of the three-year settlement for schools and High Needs, with the increase for Blackpool equating to almost 11% compared to 2021/22. Assumptions had been made about inflationary uplifts on relevant expenditure lines in 2022/23, but no assumptions had yet been made about increases to income or costs beyond 2022/23.

Due to the deficit and the ongoing pressures on costs, it has been assumed that a 0.5% transfer from Schools Block would continue to be required in future years, subject to approval by Schools Forum each year. This was shown on the Medium-Term Financial Plan for illustration purposes in each year until 2025/26, the expected date for the direct

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National Funding Formula to be implemented.

It was reported that regardless of the additional income and the actions to address pressures, a cumulative deficit on overall DSG of £2.7 million would still remain at the end of 2025/26.

Hilary Wood also reported on further work to address the deficit. It was noted 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.

The local authority continued to carry out detailed 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 as well as looking at future forecasts.

In the short-term, an immediate need for additional space to accommodate pupils currently in Blackpool's special schools was identified. Plans to create additional capacity at the Oracle building for Park's post-16 students were under consultation. As well as accommodating the current high number of sixth form students, this solution will give the school the space to be able to accept pupils with a higher level of need than has previously been the case, given that it is now designated to meet the needs of pupils with Global Learning Delay. It is expected that this will contribute to the easing of pressure on demand for places at Highfurlong and Woodlands special schools.

It was noted that there was a need for more opportunities for SEND resource provision especially in secondary schools so that Blackpool children could access appropriate support within local mainstream settings as no such local provision currently exists.

Finally, it was reported that in summer 2021, the local authority consulted with schools on banded funding for pupils with SEND in special and mainstream schools. As the outcome was not conclusive further engagement with schools would be undertaken to establish a workable solution. It was highlighted that the primary purpose of the exercise was to introduce a system that facilitated flexibility for schools in their provision for individual needs, not to reduce the funding for pupils with Education Health and Care Plans.

Questions and comments were welcomed.

It was asked whether the High Needs Working Group could reconvene to support the work being undertaken in relation to the High Needs block. Hilary Wood confirmed that the local authority would welcome the working group being involved in the development of future plans. Paul Turner also indicated that some spends were policy driven whereas others were demand driven and a peer panel to discuss these areas would be welcomed. He suggested that the focus of the High Needs working group be expanded to look at the policy driven spends, the demand driven spends as well as the statutory and non-statutory spending and this would add value to the discussions.

A further question was raised as to the closure of the SEND provision at Boundary School.

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Hilary Wood confirmed that the local authority had received notice but further exploration would be needed on the issue.

It was commented that the number of pupils at the Pupil Referral Unit had reduced due to school-led solutions being identified and implemented.

### **11 SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA 2022 - 2023**

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources presented the report and the Forum considered the local authority's proposals for the allocation of schools funding in 2022/23.

It was reported that the local authority consulted on proposals for the 2022/23 schools funding formula on 1 September 2021 and the review has focused on the following areas:

- Continued replication of the National Funding Formula for Blackpool schools
- Transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block
- Growth fund contingency

The consultation closed on 24 September 2021, with nine responses received covering the views of 13 mainstream schools. From the consultation, respondents unanimously agreed that the National Funding Formula be replicated in Blackpool's local formula for schools and that Blackpool's local formula for schools in future years should continue to mirror as far as possible the NFF. All respondents also agreed that a transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block should be made in 2022/23.

When considering the method of transferring 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block using Option A (reduction to Basic Entitlement values) or Option B (cap on gains), the views of respondents were divided.

When asked whether any surplus funding available from the 2022/23 growth funding should be set aside in a growth fund contingency to be available for meeting any unfunded growth in future years, and that any shortfall in growth funding should be drawn down from the contingency, respondents to the consultation were unanimously in favour.

When asked whether the growth contingency continued to operate in future years as described in the Growth Funding section of the consultation, the majority of responses were in favour.

The Forum considered the local authority's proposals for the allocation of school funding in 2022/23 by applying the following principles:

- Continue to apply the National Funding Formula unit values;
- Set a minimum funding guarantee of 2% per pupil funding;
- Transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block;
- Transfer any surplus from the growth funding allocation into the growth funding contingency.



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Following a vote including all school and early years members in attendance, the points above were agreed.

### Resolved:

- **Following a vote including all school and early years members in attendance, the Forum agreed the local authority's proposals for the allocation of school funding in 2022/23 by applying the following principles:**
  - **Continue to apply the National Funding Formula unit values;**
  - **Set a minimum funding guarantee of 2% per pupil funding;**
  - **Transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block;**
  - **Transfer any surplus from the growth funding allocation into the growth funding contingency.**

The Forum considered the transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block by either a reduction to the Basic Entitlement factor values, or by the implementation of a cap on gains.

Prior to voting, one member asked what the characteristics of schools were that would gain from the different options. It was noted that under option B (implementation of a cap on gains), schools with a larger budget and higher percentage gains would tend to contribute more. It was noted that in both of the options, no school with protection would see a decrease in contributions.

A further question asked whether the effects on different schools could be identified but Hilary Wood confirmed that the amounts would differ when the final formula was run using up-to-date data from the October 2021 Census.

Another question asked whether the 2022/23 budget was based on the forecast or the current numbers, it was confirmed that it was based on the same pupil numbers used in the 2021/22 formula so that a like-for-like comparison could be made.

A final question asked whether the same percentage could be applied across schools. In response, Hilary Wood confirmed that this was the process for option A (Basic Entitlement factor values) aside from the schools that were protected. It was also confirmed that the same percentage for all schools would not be possible within the constraints of the formula.

Following the discussion, the Forum was asked whether they had received enough information to vote representing their sector, there were no objections. The Forum was recommended by officers on behalf of the local authority to vote for option A - transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block by a reduction to the Basic Entitlement factor values; or option B - transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block by the implementation of a cap on gains. Following a vote including all school and early years members in attendance, the majority of members in attendance entitled to vote chose option A.

### Resolved:

- **It was agreed that the transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block should be effected by a reduction to the Basic Entitlement factor values.**

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The Forum considered whether Blackpool's local formula for schools in future years continued to mirror as far as possible the National Funding Formula (NFF) each year, until such time as there was a national change in funding for schools, or other circumstances require a change to be made. This would mean that formula factor values would mirror those in the NFF, and that the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) would be set at the same level as the funding floor used in the NFF.

### Resolved:

- **Following a vote including all school and early years members in attendance, the Forum agreed the local authority's proposal that Blackpool's local formula for schools in future years continued to mirror as far as possible the National Funding Formula (NFF) each year, until such time as there was a national change in funding for schools, or other circumstances require a change to be made. This would mean that formula factor values would mirror those in the NFF, and that the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) would be set at the same level as the funding floor used in the NFF.**

The Forum considered whether, in future years, any surplus NFF growth funding was set aside in the Growth Fund Contingency, and any shortfall in NFF growth funding would be initially met from the Growth Fund Contingency, until such time as there was a national change in funding for growth, or other circumstances require a change to be made.

### Resolved:

- **Following a vote including all school and early years members in attendance, the Forum agreed the local authority's proposal that, in future years, any surplus NFF growth funding was set aside in the Growth Fund Contingency, and any shortfall in NFF growth funding would be initially met from the Growth Fund Contingency, until such time as there was a national change in funding for growth, or other circumstances require a change to be made.**

Following the report, Paul Turner requested that an overview be provided to understand the method of growth funding. It was reported that growth funding allowed for the allocation of funding to schools that were new or growing, in recognition that there is a lag between pupils starting to attend a school, and the allocation of funding through the formula.

No further questions were noted.

## 12 DIRECT NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA FOR SCHOOLS

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources presented the report to update on the Department for Education *Consultation on Fair school funding for all: completing our reforms to the National Funding Formula*.

It was reported that the Department for Education consulted on its objective of moving to a direct National Funding Formula (NFF) for schools. It was recognised that the Department for Education had a few years to implement the changes and Blackpool was in a good

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position as its local formula already mirrored the NFF.

The areas consulted on were outlined as scope of the direct NFF, funding for premises factors, funding for growth, falling rolls funding, start up funding for new schools, transition to the new NFF, Minimum funding guarantee, English as an additional language, sparsity funding, pooling of funding for multi academy trusts, funding of central school services, implications of direct NFF on funding for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, the role of Schools Forums, and moving to a consistent school year. The responses submitted by the local authority were also included.

There were no questions following the update. Hilary Wood was thanked for the report.

### 13 COVID FUNDING UPDATE

Hilary Wood, Head of Business Support and Resources presented the report to update on financial support provided in the education sector during the COVID outbreak since the previous meeting.

The Department for Education Covid Recovery programme's overview was included in the report outlining the announcements made in June 2020, February 2021 and June 2021. It was also noted that details of allocations and reporting requirements had been published on 6 October 2021.

Following discussion, it was requested that information be presented at the next meeting to give further clarity on the tutoring grant and implications of school led tutoring on staff and clawback, as there was confusion regarding the rules of the scheme. It was agreed that such a paper would be presented at the next meeting.

One member commented that there was frustration with the funding streams as they were often linked to pupil premium eligibility and it was noted that all children had been negatively affected by the Covid 19 pandemic.

#### **Action:**

- **It was agreed that a paper be presented at the next meeting on the clawback process and implications of the Government's tutoring recovery programme.**

### 14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as Tuesday 18 January 2022.

Following discussion as to the appropriate venue for the meeting, it was agreed to look at the possibility of a face-to-face meeting, with a hybrid option if feasible.

### 15 GLOSSARY

The glossary of terms was noted for information.

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### **Chairman**

(The meeting ended 10.45)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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