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MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2022

Present:

Maintained Primary School Headteachers / representative

Elaine Allen, St John Vianney
Claire Taylor, St Nicholas

Maintained Primary School Governor

Michelle Lonican, Our Lady of the Assumption

Maintained Special School Representative

Neill Oldham, Highfurlong

Special Academy / Free Schools Representative

Gill Hughes, Park Community Academy

Academy / Free School Representatives

Abrar Hussain, Highfield (Star)
Graeme Dow, Anchorsholme (Sea View)
Roger Farley, Westminster (FCAT)
Simon Eccles, St Mary's (BEBCMAT)
Tracy Harrison, Thames / Roseacre (ATC)
Matt McIver, St George's / Baines Endowed (Cidari)

Pupil Referral Unit

Victoria O'Farrell, Educational Diversity

Non-schools members

Neil Adams, Unison
Amanda Baines, Staff/Teacher associations
Jill Gray – Post 16, Blackpool Sixth Form

In Attendance:

Sarah Chadwick, Democratic Governance Advisor (minutes)
Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Service
Hilary Wood, Head of School Finance and Funding
Darren Maddocks, Strategic Accountant
Steve Barnard, DfE Local Authority Stakeholder Engagement Team (observing)

1 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Attendees were welcomed to the meeting by Hilary Wood, Head of School Finance and Funding, prior to the election of the Chair at item 3.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gillian Campbell (Cabinet Member for Inclusion, Youth, Schools and Transience), Mark Golden (Head of Accountancy, Deputy S151 Officer), Charlotte Baron (Head of SEND) and Victoria Gent (Head of Children's Services).

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It was noted that an observer from the Department for Education's Local Authority Stakeholder Engagement Team, Steve Barnard, was in attendance at the meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 ELECTION OF CHAIR

The Forum considered the election of a Chair of the Schools Forum until August 2023.

Resolved:

To elect Roger Farley (Westminster (FCAT) Academy School Representative) as Chair of the Schools Forum until August 2023.

4 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

Having been elected, Roger Farley took the role of Chair for the remainder of the meeting. The Forum considered the election of a Vice Chair of the Schools Forum until August 2023.

Resolved:

To defer the election of a Vice Chair to the next meeting.

5 POWERS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND GOOD PRACTICE OF SCHOOLS FORUMS

Hilary Wood, Head of School Finance and Funding, 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 14 JUNE 2022

The minutes of the last meeting held on 14 June 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising:

- Family Support Worker in Schools model – Paul Turner reported that progress had been made with discussions around this and it was hoped that information would be circulated to schools after the half term break.

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All other matters arising had either been completed or were covered elsewhere on the agenda.

7 HIGH NEEDS UPDATE

In a change to the order of items on the agenda, the Forum agreed to bring forward agenda item 10 – High Needs Update and agenda item 11 – Schools Funding Formula so that those members who had requested to leave the meeting early due to a prior commitment were present to vote on the latter of those items.

Hilary Wood, Head of School Finance and Funding, updated members on the latest developments in relation to the High Needs budget.

Medium Term Financial Plan

The Forum was reminded of the financial pressures previously reported that were being experienced by Blackpool. The medium term financial plan had been updated to incorporate assumptions on inflationary impact in line with advice from the Education and Skills Funding Agency and it had been assumed that an ongoing 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block would continue to be required. Forecasted costs were again above High Needs income with an estimated overspend of £179k although a net repayment of approximately £800k brought about by transfers from other Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) blocks would reduce the cumulative deficit to around £4.157m by March 2023.

In response to a question regarding who was responsible for the deficit, Ms Wood explained that current government regulations meant that local authorities were not required to cover it from their own resources and that it was offset by maintained schools balances which covered the deficit. That arrangement was due to end in March 2023 and as there was no indication yet as to whether it would be extended, no action was currently required until the position was clearer.

Safety Valve Programme

Blackpool was moving ahead with participation in the Department for Education's (DfE) Safety Valve Programme and Ms Wood highlighted the expectations of that programme as set out in her report. The first formal meeting between the DfE Safety Valve Team and Blackpool Council had taken place on 3 October 2022 and following a 20 minute presentation it was reported that feedback was positive with the DfE expressing confidence in the authority's draft Management Plan.

The mitigations and forecasted savings included in the Management Plan were highlighted, although the Forum was advised that the Plan would likely be modified following further scrutiny by the DfE. It was suggested that it would be useful for Forum members to receive further details around the numbers to provide more context as to headline mitigations. The refined Management Plan was due to be submitted to the DfE by 13 January 2023 following which it would need to be considered by the Council's Executive with the final proposals submitted by 3 February 2023.

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In response to a suggestion from the Chair, Ms Wood agreed to arrange a meeting of the High Needs Funding sub-group in early November to allow interested Forum members to have a more detailed conversation about plans to manage the DSG deficit as part of the DfE's Safety Valve programme.

Action: Hilary Wood to circulate a proposed meeting date for the High Needs Funding Sub-Group to meet in early November and for Forum members to be invited should they be interested in attending.

8 SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA 2023/24

[Elaine Allen joined the meeting prior to consideration of this item.]

Hilary Wood, Head of School Finance and Funding, presented her report which outlined the local authority's proposals for the allocation of schools funding in 2023/24.

The provisional settlement had been announced by the DfE in July 2022. The majority of National Funding Formula (NFF) factors values would increase by approximately 2.4%, with the Ever6 free school meals and Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) factors increasing by 4.3%. The funding floor used in the national formula was to be set at 0.5% in 2023/24 meaning that all schools' NFF allocations would see a minimum gain per pupil of 0.5%. This was considered low in the face of the current economic climate and represented a reduction to the funding floor that had been set at 2% in recent years.

The Blackpool Schools Block allocation was likely to increase by approximately £2.4m, or 2.36% per pupil, compared to 2022/23 with the government maintaining its commitment to provide additional funding to Blackpool schools.

The Forum had previously agreed to mirror Blackpool's school funding formula with that of the National Funding Formula and it was therefore asked to agree a minimum funding guarantee of 0.5% per pupil in accordance with the NFF funding floor. A consultation had taken place in September 2022 to seek views on the proposal to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in 2023/24 by way of a reduction to the Basic Entitlement. 70% of those that had responded supported the proposal, with the views noted of those who had expressed concerns.

The Forum considered the local authority's proposals for the allocation of school funding in 2023/24 and following a vote the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved:

1. Following a vote by school and early years representatives in attendance, to support to the local authority's proposals for the allocation of school funding in 2023/24 by applying the following principles:

- **Continue to apply the National Funding Formula (NFF) unit values;**
- **Set a minimum funding guarantee of 0.5% per pupil funding;**
- **Transfer any surplus from the growth funding allocation into the growth funding contingency.**

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2. Following a vote by the Schools Forum as a whole, to approve the transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in 2023/24 by way of a reduction to the Basic Entitlement

[Neill Oldham, Claire Taylor and Victoria O'Farrell left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.]

9 REVIEW OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUTION

Hilary Wood, Head of School Finance and Funding, presented the report and explained that an annual review of the membership of the Schools Forum was required in accordance with the constitution. That review should take into account the balance of primary, secondary and academy representatives to ensure that the proportions remained representative of pupil numbers. The final decision on membership remained with the local authority however the Forum was consulted on its views and recommendations.

It was noted that there had been a slight change to the proportions following the conversion of St Teresa's and St Kentigern's Catholic Primary schools to academies. As the resultant change had been marginal it was proposed by the authority that the existing balance was maintained with a further review due in September 2023 following the expiry of the current membership by which time it was expected that further academy conversions would have taken place.

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.

10 LOCAL AUTHORITY UPDATE

Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services, presented the report which provided an overview of recent developments within the local authority since the last meeting.

Discussion took place in regards to school attendance figures. It was noted that college attendance figures had not been provided and Mr Turner explained that those figures were difficult to calculate. Representatives from post-16 education providers added that differences in recording attendance data, such as in respect of free periods when pupils could study elsewhere, meant the figures were not comparable. In response to a suggestion from the Chair, Mr Turner agreed to collate attendance figures from each college to provide the data individually for the next meeting.

It was reported that exclusion and suspension numbers were currently relatively high, with approximately 10 permanent exclusions already in the first half term of the new academic year. If those numbers were maintained it would result in around 60 exclusions

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in the whole year which could lead to a significant change in the High Needs and Pupil Referral Unit figures. It was noted that permanent exclusions did not often take place in primaries however Mr Turner agreed to bring figures in relation to primary fixed term exclusions to the next meeting.

The Forum discussed the cost of exclusions. Hilary Wood summarised the regulations for exclusions charges which applied to mainstream schools, explaining that the amount was pro-rated to the end of the school year, reducing as the year progressed. The system was complex and Ms Wood therefore agreed to share information with secondary colleagues as to how it worked. The Forum considered that it may be beneficial for a working party to be convened to discuss the issue in depth. On further discussion, and to avoid duplication, it was suggested by Simon Eccles, St Mary's, and agreed by the Forum, that an initial discussion on the matter should take place at the next scheduled meeting of secondary heads at 3pm on 16 November to which it was agreed to invite Ms Wood and any other interested parties not already invited.

Elective Home Education figures had increased, as they had nationally, particularly in years 10 and 11. Mr Turner advised the Forum that should all those children who were currently being educated at home return to school, there would be an insufficient number of school places to accommodate them all.

Actions:

- **Paul Turner to collate attendance figures from each post-16 setting to provide the data individually for the next meeting.**
- **Paul Turner to bring figures in relation to fixed term exclusions within the primary sector to the next meeting.**
- **Simon Eccles to invite Hilary Wood to the secondary heads meeting on 16 November 2022 at 3pm.**

11 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2022-2023

Darren Maddocks, Strategic Accountant, reported on the budget position of the 2022-23 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) as at 31 August 2022.

Budget monitoring had forecasted a £809k underspend against the DSG, a variance of £800k to plan, with major in-year variances highlighted as per the report. In relation to reserves, the forecasted £809k surplus would reduce the brought forward deficit of £4.956m to £4.147m by the end of March 2023 (excluding the maintained schools reserves of £4.129m). This was currently considered to be realistic in terms of budget expectations.

Questions and comments were invited. Discussion took place in regards to variances in the budget, including for the Pupil Referral Unit. It was noted that high transience figures was an issue and that there were currently a high number of asylum seekers needing school places in addition to those with English as a second language and those with SEND requirements. It was remarked that going forwards, it would be difficult to predict the pressure on places for such needs.

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12 DIRECT NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA FOR SCHOOLS

Hilary Wood, Head of School Finance and Funding, updated Forum members on the DfE's consultation on implementing the direct National Funding Formula (NFF).

The methodology for allocating funding to schools varied to an extent across local authorities and the direct NFF aimed to bring those methodologies closer together. The local formula adopted by Blackpool already closely mirrored the NFF, therefore it was not anticipated that there would be major changes for its schools and academies.

It was intended that the direct NFF would be implemented by 2027/28 with progress towards that target date being made at a manageable rate. Transfers from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block would continue to be allowed via a new application process and the national formula would retain the principle of notional SEN budgets.

Two options were offered in the consultation around funding for growing schools: a national formula for allocating funding directly to schools that had been experiencing significant increases in pupil numbers and an allocation of funding to local authorities to exercise local discretion on the use of available funding, the latter being the DfE's preferred option.

The NFF would incorporate a split site factor from 2024/25 with a basic element determined by whether the sites were separated by a road or railway and an element based on distance between sites. The direct NFF would retain year-on-year protection by way of a Minimum Funding Guarantee in order to avoid significant reductions in funding per pupil.

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

13 EARLY YEARS NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION

Hilary Wood, Head of School Finance and Funding, presented her report which provided an update on the DfE consultation on Early Years Funding Formulae which had closed on 16 September 2022.

The datasets which underpinned the formulae had not been reviewed for some time and the consultation proposed to update the formulae for the 2023/24 financial year and annually thereafter, resulting in some changes to local authority funding levels. Forum members were advised of the proposed changes to the Early Years National Funding Formula and the 2-year old funding formula as highlighted in the report.

14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 17 January 2023.

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Chairman

(The meeting ended 10.37 am)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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