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MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING - TUESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2016

Present:

Primary School Head Teachers/Representatives

Ms J Hirst

Ms S Diver

Secondary School Head Teacher/Representative

Ms B Foxton

Special School Head Teacher/Head Teacher Representative

Mr C Andrew

Academy School Representatives

Mr S Brennand

Ms J Carroll

Mr M Gray

Mr N Hodgkins (Chairman)

Ms T Harrison

Mr D Medcalf

Non-Schools Members

Ms A Pickup, post 16 Representative

Ms A Baines, Staff/Teacher Associations

Mr D Dickinson, Staff/Teacher Associations

Mr R Rendall, Early Years Strategic Group

In Attendance:

Ms K Barker, Lead Early Years Consultant (ITEM 9)

Mr M Golden, Finance Manager

Dr S Jenner, Principal Education Psychologist/Service Manager (ITEM 8)

Ms S McCartan, Service Manager Children's Centres (ITEM 10)

Ms H Shaw, Head of Business Support and Resources

Mr P Sharples, Schools Funding and PFI Manager

Mr P Turner, School Safeguarding Adviser (ITEM 7)

Mr C Williams, Democratic Governance Adviser (Minutes)

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Forum agreed to elect Mr Neil Hodgkins as Chairman of the Schools Forum for 2016.

2 ELECTION OF A VICE CHAIRMAN

The Forum agreed to elect Ms Jo Hirst as Vice-Chairman of the Schools Forum for 2016.

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3 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Cathy Butterworth, Primary School Governor, Ms Wendy Casson, Pupil Referral Unit and Graeme Dow, Academy School Representative.

4 REVIEW OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP

Ms Shaw advised the Forum that following the review of the number of Primary, Secondary and Academy representatives, all remaining vacancies had been filled.

The Forum welcomed Becky Foxton as Secondary School Representative and Derek Medcalf as Academy Representative.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

6 MINUTES OF THE LAST SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING

The minutes of the Schools Forum held on 13 October 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7 INTRODUCTION TO SCHOOLS SAFEGUARDING ADVISOR

Mr Paul Turner introduced himself to the Forum and provided an overview of his background in education and his role as School Safeguarding Adviser for Blackpool.

The Forum noted that since October 2015, Mr Turner had already visited 34 schools in Blackpool and aimed to visit all schools in the near future. He described the situation in relation to safeguarding as generally very good in Blackpool schools with some excellent examples of pastoral care in Primary schools and a positive uptake of training. Mr Turner explained that he had attended a number of high profile meetings such as the Blackpool Safeguarding Children's Board and in addition to his general duties, he had worked at Highfield Humanities College two mornings per week.

The Forum noted the update.

8 PROVISION FOR STATEMENTED PUPILS IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

Dr Simon Jenner presented the report on provision for statemented pupils in mainstream education.

Following a vote at the last Forum meeting, it was agreed to offer Enhanced Voluntary Redundancy (EVR) to Special Support Assistants. Dr Jenner reported that further advice had been sought following those discussions and it had since been agreed that when a pupil moved between two maintained mainstream schools in Blackpool, the Local Authority would remind schools of the obligation to transfer the Special Support Assistant with the pupil. This also included Voluntary Aided schools. There was also an obligation regarding redeployment opportunities, where appropriate.

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Dr Jenner proposed that the Forum needed to decide how best to continue to reduce the centrally employed Special Support Assistants pool and transfer the management of the staff resource to schools. In addition, he added that a decision would need to be made on whether to offer Enhanced Voluntary Redundancy (EVR) again, if appropriate, at a future date.

The Forum discussed projections of natural wastage from the central pool of Special Support Assistants, who would qualify for pension payments and the feasibility of inviting Enhanced Voluntary Redundancy on a monthly rather than annual basis.

The Forum agreed:

To monitor the central pool of Special Support Assistants and consider offering Enhanced Voluntary Redundancy again at a future date.

9 EARLY YEARS UPDATE

Ms Kate Barker presented the most recent data on the Early Years setting from August 2015. The Forum was advised that the data compared favourably to other Authorities around the country.

The Forum noted that in relation to Blackpool's bid to take part in a trial for early implementation of 30 hours free childcare (15 additional hours to the current entitlement); the result would be known in early 2016 once Central Government had made a decision and disseminated the information to Local Authorities.

In relation to the Early Years Pupil Premium, Ms Barker advised that the number of pupils accessing the grant had dropped during the Autumn 2015 term as a result of four-year olds starting school, though the figure was expected to increase in 2016.

The Forum was advised that the Department for Education and Ofsted were in the process of evaluating school based provision to establish if any registered governor-run preschool settings should be exempt from registration. Where this was the case, Ms Barker advised that those settings would be de-registered and therefore become part of the school inspection process and be included in the overall early years judgement of any future Ofsted inspections.

Members discussed the impact of any changes to governor-run settings and agreed that were the pilot bid successful, parents with children at those settings offering 30 hours free childcare had a right to know. Equally, concerns were noted about the possible effect of changes to provision, particularly on those children who were already disadvantaged in some way.

The Forum agreed to note the report.

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10 CHILDREN'S CENTRE UPDATE

Ms Sara McCartan reported on plans for the future of Blackpool Council Children's Centres. She advised that as part of the review of Blackpool Children's Centres, the key messages from parents, partners and service users was that services needed to be located under one roof and be able to respond to the needs of the community. Those surveyed also requested enhanced opening times to ensure services would be available when children and families needed them.

The Forum considered the proposal designed to improve efficiency by better utilising resources in key areas that included: Antenatal and Health Support, Targeted Family Support, Parenting Support, Community Resource and Services for Young People, Early Years and signposting to Childcare. The plans also contained provision for Council Children's Centres to become a base for the NSPCC service centre.

Ms McCartan advised that the service charges were not mandatory and there would be a consultation in the near future to look at which services would be desirable. She added that the vision would allow for enhanced partnership working, increased footfall and help to build more robust and resilient services.

Members raised concerns about the additional burden that the proposals for expansion would place on those schools with Children's Centres, at a time when funding to some had reduced. They questioned whether any funding could be made available to alleviate ongoing maintenance and other running costs associated with the proposals. Concerns were also noted about potential issues with so many agencies operating together, some with very different procedures and practices.

The Forum agreed:

1. Ms Sara McCartan to arrange a meeting with Better Start and headteachers to discuss potential funding opportunities for the Children's Centre Vision.
2. Ms McCartan to report back on those discussions at the June 2016 Schools Forum.

11 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET MONITORING 2015/2016

Mr Mark Golden, Finance Manager explained the budget position of the Dedicated Schools Grant for the 2015/2016 financial year.

He reported that the pressures on the budget remained largely the same as those presented at the previous Forum meeting in October 2015. He added that the in-year deficit stood at around £329,000 and emphasised the importance of presenting a balanced budget for 2016/2017.

The Forum noted the report.

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12 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT FORWARD PLANNING 2016/2017 AND USE OF RESERVES

Ms Hilary Shaw, Head of Business Support and Resources reported on proposals for budget savings in 2016/2017 within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and use of reserves. The Forum noted that there had been a considerable overspend and that reserves would eventually run out.

The group was informed of recurrent pressures on the DSG budget of £1,031,000 made up of: £120,000 for Early Years Pupil Premium, £124,000 for Out of Borough placements, £203,000 for Pupil Referral Unit top-up and £584,000 for Special schools pupil growth, as of November 2015 estimates. However, the Forum was advised that on 17th December 2015, the Department for Education had notified local authorities of their DSG allocations for 2016/2017. This included an additional injection of £92.5 million nationally into the High Needs Block in recognition of the pressures being reported across the country in this area. Ms Shaw advised that Blackpool's High Needs Block would receive an additional £271,000 in 2016, which would help to reduce the shortfall from £1,031,000 to £760,000. A further adjustment would also add an additional £63,000 taking the total shortfall to £697,000.

The Forum discussed the proposals related to offsetting financial pressures on the Dedicated Schools Grant budget outlined in the report. Those proposed savings included the release of underspend from the Diversity budget, release of exceptional circumstances funding, release of the Illuminate budget and a reduced lump sum in the schools formula. In addition to the proposals listed above, the post of Deputy-Director of People (Children's Services) had been taken out of the structure as a result of budget cuts. The post had been part-funded from DSG, and therefore, members noted that the savings of £60,000 would also be realised within the DSG.

Ms Shaw outlined plans to make further savings in relation to the use of DSG reserves further to those already agreed at previous Forum meetings. The plans included a reduction to the Equal Pay Reserve and the setting aside of a Special Support Assistant Redundancy reserve.

The Forum agreed (in relation to Dedicated Schools Grant budget):

1. To release underspend on Diversity budget to save £25,000
2. To release Exceptional Circumstances funding to save £24,000
3. To release part of the Illuminate budget to save £60,000 and subject to review.
4. To reduce the lump sum in schools formula from £170,000 to £165,000 to save a total of £205,000.
5. The £60,000 saved following removal of the post of Deputy-Director of People (Children's Services) to be returned to the Dedicated Schools Grant budget.

The total savings as a result of the above decisions would be £374,000 reducing the total shortfall to £323,000. The Forum heard that this gap may be reduced even further subject to the outcome of a bid to the Education Funding Agency for additional special school places.

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The Forum agreed (in relation to Dedicated Schools Grant Reserves):

1. To reduce the Equal Pay Reserve to £50,000.
2. To establish a Special Support Assistant Redundancy reserve of £50,000 subject to a review at each future Forum meeting.
3. To allocate £45,000 to Special Schools in order to cover the Minimum Funding Guarantee Protection.
4. To make a one-off allocation to Early Years providers at £383,000.

The total remaining uncommitted reserves as a result of the above decisions would be £1,238,000.

The Forum also agreed:

Hilary Shaw to inform the Forum if the Education Funding Agency decided to provide additional support for Special School places at a future date.

13 FUNDING OF UNION DUTIES

Mr Dave Dickinson, Unison representative outlined proposals related to a review of facility time for Union duties.

He explained that Trade Unions felt that it was important for Blackpool schools to continue to be committed to the costs of facilities time so that it covered all staff equitably.

The report recommendation centred around de-delegation of funding for facilities time to cover all levels of staff, including teachers and support staff, and for the per pupil rate to be increased from its current rate to £6.11.

The Forum discussed the proposal and questioned how the figure of £6.11 had been calculated. Mr Dickinson responded that the rate was a per pupil estimate. He described a number of duties and tasks typically carried out during facilities time and advised that in his opinion, the figure represented a fair price for those services. Concerns with the management of equity and risk were noted and some members felt that no strong business case could be developed if facilities time was utilised on a case by case basis.

One key question to emerge during the subsequent discussion was whether or not the existing funding for facilities time could be equitably divided among non-teaching Unions as well as Teaching Unions, rather than increasing the per-pupil amount.

The decision was deferred as part of Item 14 on the agenda.

The Forum agreed:

1. To allow maintained school members to consult with colleagues on whether to de-delegate funding for Unison facilities time (Secondary), for both Professional Teaching Association and Unison facilities time (Primaries). Relevant members to notify Hilary Shaw of their final decision before 19th January 2016.
2. Ms Hilary Shaw to inform members of the decision from action four.

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14 DE-DELEGATION OF SERVICES

Mr Paul Sharples, School Funding and Private Finance Initiative Manager outlined the proposal to de-delegate funding in 2016/2017 related to free school meal eligibility checks and insurances. In addition, the Forum noted that a decision related to de-delegation of Union duties facilities time (deferred for consideration from the previous Item) would also be required.

The Forum discussed the proposals and expressed concerns only in relation to the de-delegation of Union duties facilities time.

The Forum agreed:

1. To the continued de-delegation of funding for free school meal eligibility checks for both Primary and Secondary schools.
2. To the continued de-delegation of funding for school insurances for both Primary and Secondary schools.
3. To the continued de-delegation of funding for Professional Teaching Association facilities time for the maintained Secondary school.
4. To allow maintained school members to consult with colleagues on whether to de-delegate funding for Unison facilities time (Secondary), for both Professional Teaching Association and Unison facilities time (Primaries). Relevant members to notify Hilary Shaw of their final decision before 19th January 2016.
5. Ms Hilary Shaw to inform members of the decision from action four.

15 PUPIL GROWTH CONTINGENCY

Mr Paul Sharples reported that it was once again time for the annual review of the criteria and allocation of Pupil Growth Contingency in 2016/2017.

The Forum discussed the recommendation to approve the value of the pupil growth contingency at £205,000 in 2016/2017, which Mr Sharples advised had been calculated based on the October 2015 census data. He explained a number of pupil-driven factors included in the calculation that included; basic entitlement per primary pupil and funding for total deprivation, Looked After Children, English as an Additional Language, Pupil Mobility and prior attainment. He added that all of those figures had then been individually divided by the number of pupils on roll at each school.

The Forum agreed:

1. To approve the value of the pupil growth contingency at £205,000 in 2016/2017, based on calculations from the October 2015 census data.
2. To approve the continuation of the criteria for allocation of the contingency.

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16 SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA 2016/2017

Ms Hilary Shaw presented the report and advised the Forum to consider the Council's proposal for the allocation of the Schools Funding Formula for 2016/2017 ahead of a formal submission to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) by 21st January 2016.

Following a discussion, the Forum expressed concerns about the possible impact of the recommendations in relation to existing budget deficits but agreed the changes were necessary.

The Forum agreed:

1. To reduce the lump sum amount from £170,000 to £165,000 per school.
2. To reduce the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) Banding per pupil rate as detailed in the report.
3. To increase the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) factor by an appropriate amount to account for the affordability gap on the Highfield PFI scheme, to be matched by a contribution from the Council.
4. To retain the capping and scaling levels at 2% and 17% respectively in order to cover the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) requirement and ensure that the formula remained affordable overall.
5. That any shortfall/surplus in overall funding that may arise following further developments and analysis of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) settlement be recovered/released by a small adjustment to the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) values.

17 LOCAL AUTHORITY UPDATE

Ms Hilary Shaw notified the Forum that Mrs Delyth Curtis, Director of Children's Services intended to attend future meetings, but that she had been unable to attend the current meeting due to a long-standing commitment.

It was reported that Councillor John Jones had resigned from his post and that further information about his successor on the Schools Forum would be distributed by Democratic Governance in due course.

The Forum was advised that the amount the Council would receive in the form of a Revenue Support Grant from Central Government for 2016/2017 would be much lower than previously suggested in the Chancellor's summer statement. As a result, an additional £5 million of savings on top of the £20 million that had already been expected would need to be made in 2016/2017.

A number of new Headteacher appointments were announced that included Ms Lynette Norris at Highfield Humanities College, Mr Tony Nicholson at Montgomery High School and Ms Suzanne Ashton at Boundary Primary School.

The Forum noted the update.

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18 ACADEMY UPDATE

Ms Hilary Shaw agreed to circulate any information regarding Academies to members after the meeting.

19 DATE OF NEXT MEETING OF THE FORUM

The Forum noted the date of the next meeting as Tuesday 15th March 2016.

Chairman

(The meeting ended 12.55 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact: Chris Williams, Democratic Governance Adviser

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