

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 21 February 2018 at The Board Room - Municipal Building, Widnes

Present: Councillor T. McInerney, Observer
A. McIntyre, Education, Inclusion & Provision, HBC
A. Jones, Financial Management, HBC
A. Jones, Democratic Services, HBC
N. Middlehurst, Financial Management, HBC
E. Wright, Secondary Academy Representative
T. Bell, 16-19 Provision
A. Brown, Nursery Schools Representative (part)
J. O'Connor, PVI Representative
J. Coughlan, Primary Representative - Infant School (part)
R. Collings, Community Primary School Representative
S. Broxton, Primary Governor Representative (part)
N. Hunt, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
J. Wilson, Secondary Governor Representative
K. Landrum, (Chair) Primary Representative - VA School
J. Vincent, All Through Schools Representative
E. Haver, Special Academy Representative
S. Ainsworth, Special Schools Representative (Sub)

Action

SCF28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received for the meeting.

SCF29 HIGH NEEDS UPDATE

The Forum received an update on the High Needs budgets. The report presented the following items, which required the approval of the Schools Forum:

- the reductions to High Needs budgets required to set a balanced budget for 2018/19;
- the change in practice when applying for enhanced provision; and
- permission to make an application to the Secretary of State for exemption to the Minimum Funding Guarantee using the disapplication process.

The Forum was aware that nationally the level of demand for support for pupils with special educational needs had been increasing over recent years. However, there had not been a corresponding increase in the level of funding allocated to local authorities to meet this need.

Halton's position was outlined to schools in the consultation in October 2017 and at Schools Forum meetings in November 2017 and January 2018. It was noted that representation was made to the Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, in November 2017 about the funding pressures and the impact this was having on outcomes for children, young people and families in the Borough. Halton was advised that it must manage within the allocated resources.

Members were presented with the savings proposals required to reduce the level of overspend in 2017/18 and to balance the budget in 2018/19 in paragraph 3.8 of the report and each proposal was explained. Following this the revised High Needs Budget was presented which showed that after the revisions, a shortfall of £220,652 still existed.

The Forum discussed the proposals set out in the report and raised a number of issues:

- concern about the level of reduction in the enhanced provision budget and the impact this would have;
- concern about the consideration of school balances and increases to some schools budgets from 2018;
- The need for new criteria that would apply when schools applied for enhanced provision;
- The increase of behavioural issues of children in schools and the need for more support to tackle this issue;
- The lack of alternative provision in the Borough;
- The impact on special schools if funding levels were reduced;
- increased numbers of post 16 students; and
- The high numbers of children and young people placed in independent placements.

The Forum was asked to vote on the three recommendations mentioned above and agreed as stated below.

RESOLVED: That the Forum:

- 1) Agree the options for the reduction of High Needs Funding as stated in paragraph 3.8 of the report ensuring that the budget was brought in line with the resources available;
- 2) Agree the changes to the funding of enhanced provision in principle, subject to the development of criteria; and

- 3) Agree to an application to the Secretary of State to seek permission for exemption to the Minimum Funding Guarantee using the disapplication process, subject to the agreement of the Special Schools.

Meeting ended at 4.15 p.m.