

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 19 October 2022 held remotely

Present: Councillor T. McInerney (Observer)
K. Landrum (Chair) Primary School with a Nursery Representative
A. Jones, Financial Management, HBC
N Shafiq, Financial Management, HBC
A. Leach, Education, Inclusion & Provision
J. Farrell, Education, Inclusion and Provision
G. Ferguson, Democratic Services, HBC
J. O'Connor, PVI Representative
J. Coughlan, Primary Representative - Infant School
N. Hunt, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
J. Wilson, Secondary Governor Representative
E. Haver, Special Academy Representative
J. McConville, Secondary Academy Representative
C. Dalton, Secondary Academy Representative
E. Hall, All Through Schools Representative (Sub)

Also in attendance: one member of the public

Action

SCF6 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Thalia Bell and Cathy Liku.

SCF7 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

The Schools Forum thanked Anne Jones for all her support and wished her well for her future retirement.

SCF8 DSG FORECAST OUTTURN - 2022/23

The Forum received a report which advised of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) forecast outturn for 2022-23 which was £132,136,589, broken down as follows:

Schools Block	£102,178,425
Central Schools Services Block	£728,189
Early Years Block	£9,355,753
High Needs Block	£19,874,222

Representatives were referred to Appendix A to the report, which presented the budget lines for each block in detail and their respective totals.

The report included commentary on each of the four blocks and the forecast outturn for each. It was noted an amount of £49,904,922 was recouped from the Schools Block and an estimated £3,158,000 was recouped from the High Needs Block for academies.

The in year position was a deficit of £1,227,549, plus the deficit balance from 2021-22 of £1,856,222, less the transfer from Schools Block of £763,904, which gave a cumulative deficit of £2,319,867.

The Forum requested to know how Halton's performance was in comparison with neighbouring local authorities. In response the Forum was advised that Halton was performing well when compared against other North West local authorities. In addition it was noted that it was also performing well despite the current level of need which was high, and the deprivation in the Borough.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

SCF9 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) FUNDING FOR 2023/24

The Forum considered a report from the Strategic Director – Finance, HBC, which presented the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) provisional funding for 2023-24.

It was reported that the provisional DSG settlement was announced on 19 July 2022 and gave Halton a total of £133,191,437 for the Schools Block, Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) and the High Needs Block for 2023-24. The report presented details of the allocations for the above Blocks; the Department for Education has indicated that the Early Years provisional settlement for 2023-24 would be announced in December.

It was noted that the individual budgets to be funded from the CSSB for 2023-24 would be presented at the January meeting of the Forum and the individual High Needs Block budgets would be presented at the February meeting.

Representatives were advised that a consultation on the Schools Block funding formula to be used in Halton for 2023-24 was issued in September 2022. The consultation document was attached to the report at Appendix A and the responses at Appendix B. It was noted that of the 14 schools that responded, all were in agreement with the continuation of following the NFF funding factors and

criteria. The respondents to the consultation were also in agreement with the request for the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) being set at the January meeting, for the reasons stated.

The Forum agreed with the consultation respondents in supporting the continuation of the National Funding Formula (NFF) methods. They also agreed that a decision on the level of MFG to be applied would be made at the January meeting.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) notes the report;
- 2) supports the continuation of the National Funding Formula methods, principles and rules for mainstream primary and secondary school funding allocations for 2023-24; and
- 3) agrees to make a decision on the level of Minimum Funding Guarantee to be applied to the Schools Block funding formula for 2023-24 at the January 2023 meeting of the Forum.

Operational
Director - Finance

SCF10 FUNDING FOR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POSTS

The Forum considered a request from the Operational Director – Finance, which requested approval for a change to the level of funding from the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) for two posts within the Financial Management Division as they were becoming vacant.

The proposal to advertise for two full time positions was made to Representatives. The current agreement funds one Senior Finance Officer at 0.80 FTE and one full time Finance Officer post. Increasing the Senior Finance Officer post to full time would see an increase of £12,720 when both posts were at the top of their respective grades, based on the current pay rates.

The implications of not funding the Senior Finance Officer post at full time was outlined to Representatives. The Forum agreed that they supported the request and that approval should be given for the additional funding.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report is noted; and

Operational
Director - Finance

- 2) approval is given to fund a full time Senior Finance Officer post.

SCF11 HALTON BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT SERVICE

The Forum considered a report from the Operation Director – Education, Inclusion and Provision, which gave an overview of the offer and impacts from the Halton Behaviour Support Service (HBSS).

The report outlined the current staffing within the Team and how their work had been impacted throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. It was noted that during the last academic year service visits had returned to pre Covid levels.

Appendix one included details of training and support provided in the HBSS Statement of Impact Evidence Base for 2021-22 for Primary and Secondary Behaviour Teachers; and the Statement of Impact Evidence Base for Family Liaison Officers.

Representatives discussed the Service and concerns were raised around the current service offer, its effectiveness and availability to all schools. It was reported that the Service had been approached for help and its response had led to a school having to obtain support out of the Borough.

It was commented that this could be set as an agenda item for Heads of Primary/Secondary School in Halton meetings, however Officers advised that a decision was needed today, as time would be needed if the current service was to be stopped, to allow for discussions to take place with the Council's HR team.

Following on from the discussion, it was agreed that the Schools Forum would no longer provide funding for a Halton Behaviour Support Service. Officers advised that the Council would be looking at funding for the existing Service until the end of March 2023.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) it was agreed that the Schools Forum would no longer provide funding for a Halton Behaviour Support Service.

Operational
Director -
Education,
Inclusion and
Provision

SCF12 NOTIONAL SEN BUDGETS

The Forum considered a report from the Divisional Manager 0-25 Inclusion informing on the variance in the ability of the notional Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) budget to meet SEND needs across schools and make recommendations to review.

It was reported that increasingly over the last year, concerns had been raised by schools in relation to their ability to meet the needs of pupils due to the lack of available funding for SEND. The report described in detail how the notional SEND budgets were allocated and how they are intended to be used. Representatives were referred to the table in Appendix one, which showed the impacts of individual schools' notional SEND budgets.

It was reported that due to the increasing expectation of the use of the first £6,000 of support for a pupil coming from the schools mainstream allocation, as per the guidance, it was recommended that Schools Forum undertake a review of the notional SEND budgets, to ensure that it was providing an appropriate level of support for schools with higher levels of SEND. Options to be explored were outlined for the Forum.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum approves the establishment of a task and finish group of school heads and/or business managers to review how the notional SEND budget is allocated.

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Meeting ended at 5.26 p.m.