

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Monday, 16 March 2015 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: J. Rigby (Chairman)
M. Constantine (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Philbin, Observer
L. Fox, Secondary Academy Representative
N. Hunt, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
S. Broxton, Primary Governor Representative
D. Moran, Primary Academy Representative
A. McIntyre, Children's Organisation & Provision
A. Jones, Democratic Services
L. Feakes, School with Nursery Unit
A. Jones, Financial Management
R. Collings, Primary Representative - Infant School
K. Landrum, Primary Representative - VA School
A. Brown, Nursery Schools Representative
N. Unsworth, Financial Management
E. Hall, All Through School Representative
A. Parkinson, HBC
G. Taylor, EFA Observer

Action

SCF38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Debbie Burke.

Mr Gary Taylor, an EFA Observer, was introduced to the Forum.

SCF39 PREVIOUS MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the last meeting held on 21 January 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

Further to SCF29 Academy Balances – it was noted that two schools' information was included in the agenda pack; Wade Deacon High School and Ormiston Bolingbroke Academy. Two other schools had their balances outstanding; one was listed with Companies' House but the other was not listed with them. When the information was made available this would be circulated to the Forum.

Ann Jones

SCF40 MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

The Forum was advised that Deborah Burke, Acting Head of School of St Chads would be replacing Andrew

Keeley and Elaine Hall, Registrar at The Grange, would be replacing David Stanley who was retiring.

It was reported that the PVI Sector were currently preparing to elect two members to the Forum, who would be ready to attend the June meeting. It was noted that interest had been received regarding the Primary Governor Representative vacancy and recruitment was still needed for the Secondary Academy Representative.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

SCF41 SEN FUNDING LEVELS 2014-2015

The Forum received a report which presented an analysis of the overspend on the SEN funding levels in 2014-15.

Appendices A and B attached to the report presented information relating to the expenditure and pupil numbers in 2014-15 and 2013-14, so that comparisons could be made.

Additional information was circulated to Members which discussed:

- SEN Analysis;
- Enhanced Provision;
- Special Units;
- Special Schools;
- Service Level Agreements; and
- Other Expenditure.

In summary, Officers advised that the SEN Contingency Budget at the start of 2014-15 was £3,347,276 and the forecasted overspend now stood at £60,000. Given that £132,055 had been one-off expenditure during 2014-15 and the top-up funding levels for special schools for 2016-17 was being reviewed, officers were optimistic that with the expected carry forward from 2014-15, the Contingency would not be overspent during 2015-16.

It was noted that a detailed piece of work including the Special Schools' top up funding levels would start in June this year, in collaboration with Cheshire West and Chester Council. They would be tasked with identifying the real costs of top ups for special schools and the findings would be reported to the Forum in due course.

The Forum discussed the information presented and noted the comments made with regards to younger children

entering schools with higher needs. It was hoped that the proposed Nurture Groups (see SCF50) would go some way to pump priming services to this group of children and reducing the overall level of spend in future years.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum notes the information.

SCF42 CAPITAL REPORT

Schools Forum received a summary and progress update of the Capital Programme 2015/16 for the Children and Enterprise Directorate.

It was noted that in February 2015 the Department for Education announced the schools capital grant allocations for 2015/16. The Council's Executive Board would meet on 26 March 2015 to approve the implementation of the Capital Programme. Information on the funding received was presented in the report.

The report also provided the Forum with information on the key capital programmes and projects supported by this funding, which included a programme of planned maintenance works at community schools, as shown in appendix one. Members also noted that in addition to the capital programmes, Halebank CE VC Primary School was to be rebuilt as part of the Government's Priority School Building Programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

SCF43 UPDATE ON ACADEMY BALANCES

Information relating to Ormiston Bolingbroke Academy and Wade Deacon High School was provided to the Schools Forum for information.

RESOLVED: That the information be noted.

SCF44 REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Forum was advised that two requests for financial assistance had been received: one from Ditton Nursery and one from The Grange School.

Due to the timing of the Schools Forum meetings the Schools' cases and amounts requested had not been received. Officers requested therefore that a Sub Group of the Forum be formed, so that the requests could be

considered in a timely manner, rather than wait for the next meeting.

It was agreed that the most suitable date for volunteers was Wednesday 25 March at 2.30 pm, in Ann McIntyre's office. The following Members volunteered to sit on the Sub Group: Marjorie Constantine, John Rigby, Amanda Brown and Richard Collings. An email would be sent to these Members to confirm the arrangements.

RESOLVED: That a meeting of the Schools Forum Sub Group be convened to hear the requests for financial assistance from Ditton Nursery and The Grange School.

SCF45 CWAC / LOTC EVOLVE AGREEMENT 2015/16

The Forum was requested to consider the continuation of the provision from Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWaC) and Edufocus, the provision of Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC), Visits and Outdoor Education advice and guidance to Halton Schools.

Further, Schools Forum was asked to make permanent their previous decision, made in the March 2014 meeting, to fund this provision from April 2015 and subsequent years, from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

The Forum agreed with the importance of LOtC and that off-site activities provided a valuable opportunity for pupils and young people to encounter experiences that were not available to them in the classroom. They also recognised that LOtC could be a catalyst for positive engagement in education, improved personal performance, and promote a lifetime interest and in some cases lead to professional fulfilment.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) supports the continued provision of the LOtC Service provided by CWaC and associated trading subsidiaries, supported by Edufocus; and
- 2) agrees that it continues to be funded via the DSG for the 2015/16 financial year and subsequent years, until such time as the Forum requests a review of these arrangements.

SCF46 HIGH NEEDS STUDENTS ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK SUPPORT

The Forum received a report which informed them of the implementation of the High Needs Students (HNS) Assessment Framework and its success in managing applications from Post 16 institutions and advised of the use of support to implement the HNS Assessment Framework.

It was reported that in April 2013 Halton Local Authority introduced the High Needs Students Assessment Framework in response to each local authority becoming responsible for managing the funding for education support for high needs students aged 0-25, as outlined in the document *School Funding Reform: Next Steps towards a fairer system*, published on 26 March 2012.

The report provided information on the management of the post 16 element of the Assessment Framework and the applications and funding received in 2013/14 and 2014/15. It also explained the current position of 2014/15 applications and the tasks that were required from January 2015 in order to implement the quality assurance process.

The Forum noted the High Needs Assessment Framework would be required for 2015/16 to process all applications for High Needs Funding for students with a Learning Difficulty Assessment who had not yet transferred to an Education Health and Care Plan. The resource required therefore was £18,000 to support the process throughout the financial year.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum agrees to fund, from the High Needs budget, additional support to implement the High Needs Assessment process up to £18,000 for the financial year 2015/16.

SCF47 TOP-UP FUNDING LEVELS FOR 2015-16

The Forum received a report which advised them of the Top-Up Funding Rates for 2015/16.

It was reported that the High Needs Block was under increasing pressure, especially the top-up funding costs. In order to bring the forecast spend into line with budget, the Council had to apply a 1.5% reduction to top-up rates for Special Schools and Resource Bases. This had produced estimated savings of just under £50,000 in total. The Forum noted that the Council had not increased the Enhanced Provision rates from their 2014/15 levels.

The report discussed top-up information for the following:

- Special Schools (Appendix A refers);
- Resource Bases (Appendix B refers);
- Resource Base Service Level Agreements;
- The Pupil Referral Unit; (noted that values were outstanding); and
- Enhanced Provision Funding.

The following comments / points were made:

- With reference to paragraph 3.5, one member wished to be notified whether the pupil details they had submitted regarding enhanced funding were correct or not, as no response was received from Finance regarding this. Officers would aim to correct this for future submissions;
- Concerns were raised that there were a number of spare places in Resource Bases whilst funding continued to be provided to children with Enhanced Provision in mainstream schools. Anita Parkinson acknowledged this concern and explained the processes/diagnoses that were required prior to a placement being made;
- If a child was being assessed for a place in a Resource Base, while the process was undertaken, the child would attract funding through Enhanced Provision to enable the school to support the child; and
- A working group (referred to earlier in minute SCF41) was being set up to review the top-up levels for Special Schools, Resource Bases and Enhanced Provision, and the Forum would be updated on progress in June.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

SCF48 EARLY YEARS FUNDING FOR 2015-16

The Forum was presented with the Additional Notional SEN funding criteria and allocations for 2014-15.

It was noted that under the new School Funding Regulations the Council was required to gain agreement from Schools Forum on the funding factors used for the Early Years settings. The following was proposed:

Ann McIntyre

- Maintained Sector – not to change the funding factors used – Basic per Pupil, Deprivation (using IDACI), Lump Sum and LA Rates (for Nursery Schools only).
- Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector (PVI) – not to change the funding factors used – Basic per Pupil, Deprivation (IDACI) and LA Rates.

Officers tabled the Early Years Cash Values 2015-16 however this was incomplete and would be sent round to Schools Forum Members after the meeting.

Ann Jones

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) notes the report;
- 2) agrees the funding formula for Maintained Early Years settings; and
- 3) agrees the funding formula for PVI settings.

SCF49 SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS REVIEW

The Forum was advised on the revision of the Halton Scheme for Financing Schools (SFFS).

It was noted that the *Halton Scheme for Financing Schools* and *Financial Guidance for Schools* had not been reviewed or updated for some time. Representatives from maintained schools plus Internal Audit, Schools Support and Financial Management met during the Autumn Term and went through the document discussing changes that were needed.

The two documents had now been amalgamated to ensure that all financial guidance was easily accessible in just one document. Changes had been made in line with Statutory Guidance issued by the Department for Education in February 2014. The major changes were discussed in the report.

It was noted that the document would be subject to consultation with Head Teachers and Governing Bodies of all maintained schools after the Spring break. Following this it would be brought back to Schools Forum in June for approval, with the aim that it comes into effect from 1 September 2015.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) notes the report; and

- 2) the revised Scheme be put out to consultation to Head Teachers and Governing Bodies as per Section 1.4 of the report.

SCF50 NURTURE GROUP PILOT FUNDING

The Forum was presented with a summary of the proposed Nurture Group (NG) pilots and the associated delivery costs from September 2015.

Members were advised that further to the previous reports on funding for Pupil Referral Units on 19 March 2013, 21 January 2014 and 14 March 2014, a comprehensive strategic review of Alternative Provision (AP) was now complete. A commitment to develop a Borough wide strategy to support Emotional Health and Wellbeing was agreed following this review and a working party engaged with schools to identify gaps in provision.

A draft document '*Halton Emotional, Wellbeing and Health Approach*' was in place and was aligned to the Mental Health Strategy 2014-2019 Action Plan. It was noted that a key priority of this approach was to implement 'A person centred graduated response' through the development of NG practice in primary and secondary settings.

The report provided information on exclusions in Halton compared with national figures and gave details of the costs of the current out of Borough provision and details of the resources needed to run a NG. For information the NG specifications were listed in Appendix 1 of the report.

Overall the Forum supported the NG concept and agreed that there were pupils that would benefit from the service. It was noted that the pilot would run for 12 months and could be extended if it was proved successful. It was also noted that there was the opportunity for the Authority to bid for a chance for additional funding from Central Government if accepted as a pilot.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) agrees to fund £155,180 to implement a Nurture Group pilot in both KS1 and KS3 settings in Runcorn and Widnes (4 settings) from September 2015 to July 2016; and
- 2) agrees that expressions of interest could be sought from primary and secondary schools in Halton, to

provide the settings for the Nurture Groups.



Meeting ended at 5.50 p.m.