

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 20 January 2016 at 4pm The Board Room - Municipal Building, Widnes

Present: J. Rigby (Chairman)
Councillor Philbin, Observer
K. Albiston, PVI Representative
J. O'Connor, PVI Representative
J. Coughlan, Primary Representative
L. Feakes, School with Nursery Unit
A. Brown, Nursery Schools
S. Broxton, Primary Governor Representative
R. Collings, Primary Representative - Infant School
N. Hunt, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
J. Wilson, Secondary Governor Representative
J. Vincent, All Through Schools Representative
L. Davies, Secondary Academy Governor Representative
K. Landrum, Primary Representative - VA School
I. Kirkham, Secondary Academy Representative
A. McIntyre, Education, Incusion & Provision
A. Jones, Financial Management, HBC
A. Jones, Democratic Services
N. Unsworth, Financial Management, HBC
A. Aleksic – EAL Service (SCF27)
S. Williams – Halton Virtual Headteacher (SCF 28)
H. Austin – Chestnut Lodge Special School (SCF29)
S. Ainsworth – Brookfields School (SCF29)
L. King – Ashely School (SCF29)

Action

SCF24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Marjorie Constantine, Deborah Burke and Thalia Bell.

SCF25 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

SCF26 MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Members were introduced to two new Members, Leslie Davies, a Governor at The Heath School, had filled the Secondary Academy Representative vacancy and Ian Kirkham had taken over from Lynn Fox at Wade Deacon as Secondary Academy Representative.

SCF27 EAL SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

The Forum received a report which updated them on the work of the *English as an Additional Language (EAL) Service* and sought approval to continue to fund this provision in 2016-17. The Chairman introduced Anna Aleksic who leads the EAL service and presented the report to the Forum.

It was noted that the EAL Team continued to be hosted by St Chad's High School and worked with new arrivals to Halton Local Authority schools across Key Stages 1 to 5. The Team aimed to ensure equality of opportunity, access and inclusion for pupils with EAL needs. Members were advised that Team Members worked in collaboration with schools in supporting their language work with EAL pupils and encouraged a raised awareness and understanding of cultural diversity. Further, the service also provided information, training, advice and resources regarding cultural and religious matters; and school, home and community links were supported by the provision of translated school information in various languages.

The Board was advised that during the Academic year 2014-15, the EAL Team worked across all the 18 Primary Schools and 6 Secondary Schools, where additional language support had been identified as being needed to ensure progress in the acquisition of academic English. Anna presented some successful case studies resulting from the service and the numbers of pupils using the service.

The Forum agreed the importance of the Service for Halton's Schools and that it should be supported for the 2016-17 academic year.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) notes the report and recognises the support provided by the EAL Team; and
- 2) that the support for the provision of the centrally based EAL service provided by St Chads be continued; at a cost of £146,828 for 2016-17.

SCF28 CHILDREN IN CARE (CIC) - PUPIL PREMIUM

The Forum received a presentation on Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) for Children in Care. Sharon Williams, the Head of the Halton Virtual School, explained why, when and how

the money should be used.

She advised the Forum that the Grant was allocated subject to the following condition as taken from the Conditions of Grant:

“The grant allocation for Looked After Children must be managed by the designated Virtual School Head in the Authority that looks after those children to be used for the benefit of the looked after child’s education needs as described in their Personal Education Plan (PEP).”

She explained the overarching principles of the Grant and stressed the importance of the Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for the children, which were statutory documents. She presented some guidance and examples of effective PEP writing. It was noted that the onus was on the school to present an effective and high quality PEP; although with support from the Virtual School Head if needed.

The presentation provided examples of what PP+ could be used for and gave examples where PP+ would not be allocated.

On behalf of the Forum the Chairman thanked Sharon for her informative presentation.

RESOLVED: That the Pupil Premium Plus for Children in Care be noted.

SCF29 SPECIAL SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA

The Forum received an update on progress to date in revising the banding arrangements for Special Schools to ensure future funding was in line with the resources available.

Members were reminded that at the October 2015 meeting it was agreed that a review of special schools banding levels could be undertaken to bring funding in line with the resources available. Officers advised that an initial briefing meeting was held with the four special school Headteachers / Principal on 5 October 2015 prior to the School Forum meeting. The purpose of the review was discussed with them and the reasons it was necessary were outlined and discussed. Following this three meetings in total were held and the issues considered were listed in paragraph 3.3 of the report. The report went on to list the details of the meeting and the agreements that were made

following them.

Three of the Special Schools headteachers were present: Chestnut Lodge; Ashley School and Brookfields School; they presented their concerns over the loss of funding and potential impacts of this to the Forum. One Headteacher requested that consideration be given to the funding of specialised equipment separately.

After considering the proposals for the reduction in funding the Forum agreed to a reduction of £250,000 in 2016-17 through the revised banding levels, and agreed to support the disapplication request to the EFA for exemption to the MFG in 2016-17 to enable this.

It was noted that further meetings had been scheduled to take place with the four special schools in the next two months to agree the final banding levels for 2016-17. Following this a further report would be provided to Schools Forum in March 2016, with the outcome of the disapplication and the final banding levels for 2016-17.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) notes the progress to date;
- 2) agrees a budget reduction of £250,000 in 2016-17 through revised banding levels; and
- 3) supports the disapplication request to the EFA for exemption to the MFG in 2016-17.

SCF30 INFANT FREE SCHOOL MEALS - VERBAL UPDATE

A statement regarding the identification of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) was read out to the Forum. This was following a request for the information from the Schools Forum in previous meetings.

It was explained that 7 years ago the Housing Benefit form was simplified so that people who claimed housing benefit were enrolled for FSM automatically. This had led to an increase in uptake of FSM by a third.

The current process was outlined and it was noted that some eligible children's parents may be missed because they lived as part of a household where they were not the main tenant or owner of the property; and some eligible children were filtered out because their parents had 'opted out' of receiving FSM when they completed their

benefit forms. This was however a very small number and amounted to around 15 families.

The Forum was advised that a data gathering exercise had recently been undertaken by the Revenue and Benefits Team to ensure that all known families currently on benefits or who had come off benefits were identified. This information had been cross checked with the FSM system by the FSM team who then updated reports where needed. This up to date data was then sent to all schools.

In conclusion, the Forum was advised that the benefits data itself would not enable the Authority to capture all eligible children because not all eligible children were known to the benefits system. However, the large majority of eligible families would be identified in this way. For non-housing benefit / council tax reduction applicant families, the only way to capture their eligibility on the FSM system was for Schools to persuade parents to submit an individual Free School Meal application form.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

SCF31 CONTINGENCY UPDATE

The Forum received an update on the value of the Dedicated School Grant contingencies for 2015-16.

Members were advised of the following balances:

General Schools Contingency – £207,966 and following the deductions already agreed, a balance of £100,930 remained.

Pupil Growth Contingency - £100,000 plus a carry forward of £80,001 which gave a total of £180,001. The proposals for eligible schools were noted.

High Needs Contingency - £1,129,210 plus a carry forward from 2014-15 of £404,726 which gave a total of £1,533,936. Following the agreed funding to date, this budget was in deficit of £594,966 and it was likely that this would increase.

Early Years Contingency – this was currently nil with a carry forward of £142,996. The budget was now in deficit of £124,298.

Central Contingency – carry forward from 2014-15 was £1,840,337. Following payment of two academy conversions the remaining balance was £1,764,491.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum note the current balance on each of the contingencies.

SCF32 SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS CONSULTATION

The Schools Forum received a report regarding the changes that were being proposed to the Scheme for Financing Schools (SFFS).

A number of statutory changes had been made to the SFFS by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) regarding the publication of the register of business interests that must be held by all schools, and that schools could only borrow money (which included finance leases) with the approval of the Secretary of State. The Council was in the process of consulting with schools on these changes; Members were referred to the consultation document attached at Appendix one.

The consultation document was sent to schools during the second week of January with returns requested by 22 January 2016. The results of the consultation would be presented at the March Schools Forum meeting, with the aim for the changes to be implemented from 1 April 2016.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum notes the report.

SCF33 FORECAST OUTTURN 2015-16

The forecast outturn positions of DSG budgets for 2015-16 were presented to the Forum.

It was reported that it had been identified by officers that the budgetary requirements for 2016-17 would be insufficient. As part of the budget setting process the forecast outturn position was reviewed for the current financial year to give an indication of the carry forward available for 2016-17.

Members noted the forecasted overspends for: Schools Block; Early Years Block; and High Needs Block as detailed in the report. It was noted that with the funds brought forward from previous years, an approximate amount of £2.8m would be carried forward into 2016-17, which would be needed to minimise reductions in budgets.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

SCF34 NOTIONAL SEN

The Forum considered a report which advised them of the Additional Notional SEN funding criteria and allocations for 2015-16.

It was reported that under the new School Funding Regulations Local Authorities could provide additional targeted support to schools where it would be unreasonable to expect the first £6,000 of additional support for all high needs pupils to be provided due to an exceptional number of such pupils on roll.

The report explained the criteria adopted for primary schools, secondary schools and academies and provided Members with examples of how the Additional Notional SEN funding would be applied. Paragraph 3.5 listed the allocations for 2015-16 which would be funded from the High Needs Block carry forward from 2014-15 by the end of January 2016.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum notes the allocation of the additional Notional SEN funding for 2015-16.

SCF35 PUPIL GROWTH 2015/16

The Forum received a report which outlined the criteria for the Pupil Growth Contingency for 2015-16 and provided details of the qualifying schools.

The Forum was reminded that the Primary Pupil Growth contingency budget for 2015-16 was set at £100,000, whilst the Secondary Pupil Growth contingency budget was set at £80,000.

The report advised Members of the Education Funding Agency (EFA) regulations with regards to the payment of Pupil Growth monies and advised of the qualifying schools based on the October 2015 census data compared with the October 2014 data.

Members discussed the allocations and agreed that the schools listed for pupil growth contingency for 2015-16 be approved.

RESOLVED: That the allocations for Pupil Growth Contingency Funding be approved for Sandymoor Free School and St Bede's Junior School.

SCF36 INDICATIVE DSG ALLOCATION 2016-17

A report was presented to the Forum that informed of the allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant settlement for 2016-17, which had been split between three notional blocks; Schools Block, High Needs Block and Early Years Block and were noted as follows:

- Schools Block – Total cash value £84,707,418;
- Early Years Block – Total indicative funding £5,336,709;
- High Needs Block – Total funding £13,234,372 (after EFA deduction); and
- DSG Settlement – Total £103,304,127.

A funding gap of £2,238,584 to the indicative DSG allocation was noted as were the actions taken so far to close this gap.

The Forum went on to discuss the proposals to:

- a) continue funding central budgets from the Schools Block noting the requirements for 2016-17; and
- b) fund centrally held budgets from the Early Years Block, noting the requirement of £5,009,249.

The total of the High Needs Block centrally held budget of £7,187,918 and allocations were noted.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) notes the DSG settlement for 2016-17;
- 2) agrees the Schools block centrally funded budgets; and
- 3) agrees the Early Years Block centrally funded budgets.

SCF37 SCHOOLS BLOCK FORMULA 2016-17

Members received a report which advised on the final funding formula for Primary and Secondary Schools for 2016-17.

Further to the October meeting of Schools forum it was agreed that the DSG could be re-profiled so that funding was better allocated in line with budget requirements.

Officers advised that the Education Funding Agency (EFA) had not approved the request by the Forum to award

the Sparsity Factor to Daresbury Primary School. The disapplication of the Minimum Funding Guarantee in relation to the Spilt Sites Factor for Fairfield Primary was agreed by the EFA.

Officers had also submitted a request to use the Exceptional Premises Factor in relation to the joint use costs of Brookvale Recreation Centre by Ormiston Bolingbroke Academy which the EFA no longer funded. No response had been received yet.

Members were referred to Appendix A which detailed the Schools Block Funding Formula cash values being used for 2016-17, with comparisons to the cash values for 2015-16; and Appendix B which detailed in indicative Schools Block budgets for Primary and Secondary schools for 2016-17, with comparisons to 2015-16.

Officers advised the Forum:

- a) of the Primary and Secondary de-delegated budgets and provided comparisons to those for 2015-16;
- b) that the IDACI bandings had been updated by the Government in September 2015 and the new bandings had been applied to the October census data;
- c) that Appendix C to the report compared the pupil numbers in each band for 2015-16 to 2016-17;
- d) that the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) was continuing at minus 1.5% for 2016-17; and
- e) the indicative Schools Block budgets would be distributed to all Head Teachers on 21 January 2016.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

Meeting ended at 6.30 p.m.