

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 24 February 2021 held remotely

Present: Councillor T. McInerney (Observer)
A. Jones, Democratic Services, HBC
A. McIntyre, Education, Inclusion & Provision, HBC
A. Jones, Financial Management, HBC
N Shafiq, Financial Management, HBC
K. Landrum, (Chair) Primary School with a Nursery Representative
A. Brown, Nursery Schools Representative
J. O'Connor, PVI Representative
J. Coughlan, Primary Representative - Infant School
N. Hunt, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
E. Haver, Special Academy Representative
J. McConville, Secondary Academy Representative
H. Austin, Community Special Schools Representative
L. Roberts, Small Primary Representative
T. Nairn, PVI Representative
E. Hall, All Through School Representative (sub)

Action

SCF19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Jim Wilson and Thalia Bell.

SCF20 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record subject to noting Nigel Hunt had submitted apologies in advance of the meeting.

SCF21 MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

The Forum received an update on the current membership of the Forum, which was noted.

RESOLVED: That the Forum confirms and notes the updated membership as outlined in the report.

SCF22 DSG FORECAST OUTTURN 2020-21

The Forum received the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) forecast outturn for 2020-21.

It was reported that the DSG allocation for 2020-21 was £122,099,358 and was broken down as follows:

Schools Block	£92,581,025
Central School Services Block	£ 665,450
High Needs Block	£19,004,582
Early Years Block	£ 9,848,301

The report provided details on the forecast for each of the above blocks and Appendix A gave a detailed breakdown of the budgets, forecast and variances. It was noted that the DSG as at March 2021 was forecast to be £1,502,421 in deficit, largely due to the pressures on the High Needs block as described in paragraph 3.4.

Representatives were requested to decide on whether to carry over £100k unspent funding and use against the High Needs overspend or add this to the contingency for next year. A vote was cast and the majority voted to carry the amount over to next year as part of the contingency.

The Forum discussed the ongoing matter of promoting inclusion within schools. The processes for addressing challenging behaviour within schools was being revised and relaunched and would be introduced across all schools. There was a need for more flexible packages for children so they could be accommodated within mainstream schools and this would reduce the reliance on costly specialist provision. It was reported that until the Borough had its own SEMH provision, interim arrangements were progressing with an SEMH provider who would use temporary accommodation to deliver this.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) notes the report; and
- 2) agrees that the £100k underspend from this year be carried over to next year's contingency budget.

Financial
Management,
HBC

SCF23 EARLY YEARS BLOCK FUNDING FOR 2021-22

The Forum received the Early Years Block funding for 2021/22.

Officers advised that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) settlement was announced on 17 December 2020, giving an indicative allocation of £9,862,865 for the Early Years Block. Halton was continuing to follow the Early Years funding formula with a universal base rate for all sectors, a deprivation factor using IDACI and the quality

factor for staff across all sectors who were qualified at Level 5 and above.

It was announced that the hourly rate received by Halton from the DfE for the provision of free entitlement to 3 and 4 year olds remained at £5.12 and the rate for the provision of free entitlement to 2 year olds had increased by 0.8p per hour to £5.44.

Since the publication of the agenda, work on the funding formula had started and this was presented to the Forum, together with the proposed centrally retained budgets which the Forum were asked to approve.

The Chair thanked the Finance Department and the Education Department for their support for Early Years providers.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) note the report; and
- 2) agree the centrally retained budgets presented in the appendix.

SCF24 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK FUNDING FOR 2021-22

The Forum received the High Needs Block funding for 2021-22. This was £18,554,788 after recoupment for per place funding in academies and independent special schools.

The details of the allocation of the High Needs Block were attached at appendix A and the Forum was requested to approve the centrally retained budgets.

Representatives noted that for 2021-22 a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block was not requested. However if a deficit balance from 2020-21 could not be cleared in 2021-22, then there will be no choice but to request a transfer from schools and Schools Forum for 2022-23.

The Forum was advised that the Department for Education had opened a consultation on the National Funding Formula for High Needs for 2022-23 and beyond. All were encouraged to take part and give their opinions.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) note the report; and
- 2) agree the centrally retained budgets as per the appendix.

SCF25 CENTRAL SCHOOL SERVICES BLOCK (CSSB) 2021-22

The Forum received the Central School Services Block funding for 2021-22.

The grant allocation to the CSSB for 2021-22 was £698,973 which was an increase of £33,523 from 2020-21. The proposed budgets to be funded from the CSSB were presented in paragraph 3.2, against the amounts for the previous year.

It was noted that there was an 11.56% increase in the charge for licences for maintained schools, which are purchased by the DfE and recharged to local authorities. Further, there may be a reduction in exclusions income, as these are lower this year due to the Pandemic.

It was proposed that the unallocated balance of £145,536 be set to the DSG contingency until later in the year when it could be decided how best it could be used.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) notes the report; and
- 2) agrees the Central School Services Block budgets.

SCF26 HALTON SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS UPDATE

The Forum received the proposed changes and consultation to the Halton Scheme for Financing Schools (SFFS) for March 2021.

It was reported that the Department for Education issues updates to Schemes for Financing Schools on a regular basis, which local authorities are required to consider or implement. A consultation was required with all maintained schools on the proposed changes prior to requesting approval from Schools Forum.

Representatives were advised of the proposed changes in the document attached at Appendix A, where the changes were highlighted in red font. It was noted that the SFFS was sent to all maintained schools on Monday 25 January with a deadline for responses 10 February 2021;

unfortunately, no responses were received.

RESOLVED: That the Forum

- 1) notes the report and consultation; and
- 2) agrees the proposed changes to Halton's Scheme for Financing Schools, effective immediately.

Financial
Management,
HBC

Meeting ended at 5.05 p.m.

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