

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 13 October 2021 held remotely

Present: Councillor T. McInerney (Observer)
N. Raine, ESFA (Observer)
A. Jones, Democratic Services, HBC
A. Jones, Financial Management, HBC
N Shafiq, Financial Management, HBC
R. Sprigings, Financial Management, HBC
A. Leach, Education, Inclusion & Provision
M. West, Education, Inclusion & Provision, HBC
K. Landrum, (Chair) Primary School with a Nursery Representative
A. Brown, Nursery Schools Representative
T. Bell, 16-19 Provision Representative
J. Coughlan, Primary Representative - Infant School
N. Hunt, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
J. Wilson, Secondary Governor Representative
A. Sheppard, VA Schools Representative
J. McConville, Secondary Academy Representative
I. Critchley, All Through Schools Representative
L. Roberts, Small Primary Representative
C. Dalton, Secondary Academies Representative
C. Ogden, Community Special Schools Representative (Sub)

Action

SCF7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Jane O'Connor, Elaine Haver and Heather Austin (substitute representative sent).

SCF8 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

SCF9 DSG FUNDING FOR 2022/23

The Forum received the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) provisional funding for 2022-23.

It was reported that the DSG was announced on 19 July 2021 and gave Halton a total of £125,445,437 for the Schools Block, Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) and High Needs Block, for 2022-23.

The report presented details of the allocations for the above Blocks whilst the Early Years Block provisional settlement for 2022-23 would be announced in December. It was noted that the individual budgets to be funded from the

CSSB for 2022-23 would be presented at the January meeting of the Forum. The individual High Needs Block budgets would be presented at the February meeting as in previous years; this would allow time for the budgets to be calculated following a separate consultation to consider a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, to support the pressure on the High Needs budgets, for reasons outlined in the report.

Representatives were advised that a consultation on the Schools Block funding formula to be used in Halton for 2022-23, was issued early September. This was attached at Appendix A and the responses to this could be found in Appendix B. The Chair commented that the low number of schools that had responded to the consultation was disappointing.

It was noted that all schools who did respond were in agreement with the continuation of following the National Funding Formula (NFF) funding factors and criteria. The respondents to the consultation were also in agreement with the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) being set at the January meeting, for the reasons stated.

Forum representatives agreed with the consultation respondents in supporting the continuation of the 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 2022-23; and
- 3) agrees to make a decision on the level of Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to be applied to the Schools Block funding formula for 2022-23, at the January meeting.

SCF10 DSG FORECAST OUTTURN 2021/22

The Forum received the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) forecast outturn for 2021-22.

The report presented commentary on the DSG allocation of £130,991,359 and how this was broken down

into the four blocks – Schools Block, Central Schools Services Block (CSSB), Early Years Block and High Needs Block.

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

The overall position was a forecast in-year deficit of £1,193,032, with a cumulative forecast deficit of £2,188,774.

The Forum discussed the following in relation to the ongoing pressures and challenges faced with the high needs block:

- Halton has a disproportionately higher than the national average number of children requiring special schools;
- The use of the Educational Psychologists' service was hampered slightly by the pandemic so could not be used to its full potential;
- The numbers of children leaving the Borough for specialist education was predicted to grow but LA officers were looking to identify a range of solutions to retain pupils in-borough wherever possible;
- The DfE delay in progression of the SEMH Secondary Free School build was impacting upon LA spend within the high needs block, and would continue to impact financially with a requirement for alternative specialist provision placements;
- The Authority was limited in its capacity to develop new specialist provision either within existing schools or new schools; but continued to work collaboratively with schools and academy trusts to seek resolutions; and
- Discussions had taken place with staff in special schools to see if there was a way of sharing practice and expertise with mainstream schools.

It was commented that the preferred option for the Authority, children and their families, was for Halton children to be educated in Halton schools however, this was continuing to be extremely challenging and the special schools in Halton continued to be under pressure due to the demand for places.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 4.30 p.m.