

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 13 July 2022 held remotely

Present: Councillor T. McInerney (Observer)
 A. Jones, Democratic Services, HBC
 A. Jones, Financial Management, HBC
 N Shafiq, Financial Management, HBC
 A. Leach, Education, Inclusion & Provision, HBC
 J. Farrell, Education, Inclusion & Provision, HBC
 K. Landrum, (Chair) Primary School with a Nursery Representative
 J. O'Connor, PVI Representative
 J. Coughlan, Primary Representative - Infant School
 N. Hunt, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
 E. Haver, Special Academy Representative
 A. Sheppard, VA Schools Representative
 J. McConville, Secondary Academy Representative
 H. Austin, Community Special Schools Representative
 C. Dalton, Secondary Academy Representative
 C. Liku, Community Nursery Schools Representative
 D. Elston, 16-19 Provision Representative (Sub)
 E. Hall, All Through Schools Representative (Sub)

		<i>Action</i>				
SCF1	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Thalia Bell (named substitute representative Donna Elston attended).</p>					
SCF2	<p>MINUTES</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2022 were agreed as a correct record.</p> <p>SCF24 – Halton Behaviour Support Service – it was reported that a further update would be submitted to the October meeting of the Forum.</p>	<p>Operational Director - Education, Inclusion and Provision</p>				
SCF3	<p>DSG OUTTURN 2021-2022</p> <p>The Forum received a report informing of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Outturn for 2021-22.</p> <p>It was reported that the final amount of DSG allocated to Halton for 2021-22 was £130,991,359, which was split as follows:</p> <table style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="padding-right: 20px;">Schools Block</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£99,050,733</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CSSB</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£698,973</td> </tr> </table>	Schools Block	£99,050,733	CSSB	£698,973	
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Early Years Block	£9,862,865
High Needs Block	£21,378,788

The report provided commentary for each of these Blocks and a breakdown of the 2020-21 outturn position was shown at Appendix A.

The Forum noted that with this year's overspend and carry forward balance from the previous financial year, there was a total DSG deficit of £1,856,222, which would be carried forward into 2022-23.

Representatives were requested to make a decision on the treatment of the unspent schools de-delegated contingency budget amount of £192,590, which was recommended to remain ring-fenced as a schools contingency budget for 2022-23. This was discussed by the Forum and the consensus was that this amount would be put to better use in the contingency, taking into consideration the potential for more schools applying for financial assistance in the future, for example due to rising costs associated with running schools in line with the rising cost of living.

RESOLVED: That the Schools Forum

- 1) notes that the deficit balance of DSG from 2020-21 of £1,856,222 will be carried forward to the 2022-23 financial year; and
- 2) agree that the total unspent schools de-delegated contingency be ring-fenced and carried forward into the schools contingency budget for 2022-23.

Operational
Director - Finance

SCF4 SCHOOL BALANCES 2021-22

The Forum received a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which presented the level of funding brought forward from 2021-22 by Halton's maintained schools.

It was noted that whilst balances were still reported to the Schools Forum, no excess surplus balance limits were in place. However, the Forum retained the right to require schools to provide further information as to how their balance would be spent, should they so decide.

The Individual School Budget balances for Halton maintained schools at the end of 2021-22 was £7,706,982. This was an increase of £607,724, compared to the

balances for 2020-21. The report provided a breakdown of where the increased and decreased balances lay between nursery, primary, secondary, special schools and the PRU.

Members were referred to Appendix A, which showed the balances for each maintained school along with their 2020-21 balance for comparison. Appendix B showed the Devolved Formula Capital Grant year-end balances for 2021-22 along with their 2020-21 balance for comparison.

Officers advised that the information in the report covered maintained schools only; there was no information submitted for the academies balances. One academy representative did comment that academies were audited every year and their finances were stringently monitored by the ESFA and their final accounts were published each year.

Representatives discussed the information before them and raised concerns over some schools high balances. It was commented that those who had consistently increasing balances year after year should be contacted for an explanation. It was also commented that those schools with very low balances should also be contacted for explanations, as this was also cause for concern.

The Forum agreed that due to the later than usual scheduling of this meeting coinciding with almost the end of term, that at present no approach would be made to the schools falling into the above categories. It would however, give time for a piece of work to be carried out to identify those schools with very high and very low balances, make comparisons with previous years to see whether there were any trends for concern, which would then allow the Forum to make decisions on which schools should be contacted.

The Forum agreed to this approach and requested that this information be presented at the next meeting, for the Forum to then determine which schools would be contacted for further information.

RESOLVED: That the schools balances for 2021-22 be noted.

SCF5 DELEGATED TOP UP FUNDING (DTUF)

The Forum considered a report from the Divisional Manager – Inclusion 0-25, on the reform of the use of *Delegated Top Up Funding* (DTUF) in order to support schools.

Operational
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It was reported that the DTUF was set up as a means of providing schools with High Needs funding for children at risk of exclusion; it was later extended to include children with medical needs but not learning needs.

The report set out the difficulties being experienced with the setting up and commitment of DTUF panels, which have been unable to progress as intended. In order to ensure that funding requests could be assessed in the absence of a panel, the Forum was presented with two alternative options for consideration, Option A and Option B; details of each were outlined in the report in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6.

Representatives discussed the options presented and Officers responded to their questions on the problems being experienced with the current arrangements. The Forum agreed that Option A would be the better option to proceed with, subject to the inclusion of school representation on the Partnership Panel.

RESOLVED: That DTUF funding be moved in line with other provision and placement decisions through Halton's EHCP Partnership Panel (option A).

Operational
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Meeting ended at 4.55 p.m.