

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 14 June 2023 held remotely

Present:

A. Jones, Democratic Services, HBC
N Shafiq, Financial Management, HBC
J. Farrell, Education, Inclusion & Provision, HBC
S. Goodwin, Financial Management, HBC
K. Landrum, (Chair) Primary School with a Nursery Representative
J. Coughlan, Primary Representative - Infant School
N. Hunt, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
J. Wilson, Secondary Governor Representative
E. Haver, Special Academy Representative
A. Sheppard, VA Schools Representative
C. Dalton, Secondary Academy Representative
C. Liku, Community Nursery Schools Representative
E. Hall, All Through Schools Representative (Sub)

Action

SCF20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Ben Barton (16-19 Provision), Jane O'Connor (PVI) and Joanne Robertson (Small Primary).

SCF21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 February were agreed as a correct record.

SCF22 DSG OUTTURN 2022-23

The Forum received a report informing of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Outturn for 2022-23.

It was reported that the final amount of DSG allocated to Halton for 2022-23 was £135,992,777, which was split as follows:

Schools Block	£102,178,425
CSSB	£728,189
Early Years Block	£9,276,678
High Needs Block	£23,809,485

The report provided detailed commentary for each of these Blocks, which highlighted any recoupments, overspends and underspends. A detailed analysis of the final 2022-23 outturn position was provided at Appendix A.

The Forum noted that with this year's DSG overspend (£1,036,363) and carry forward deficit balance from the previous financial year (£1,856,222), there was a total DSG deficit of £2,892,585, which would be carried forward into 2023-24.

In relation to the High Needs Block, the ongoing pressures being experienced due to increasing numbers of pupils requiring an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was recognised by Representatives and noted that this situation was not unique to Halton, it was a countrywide issue. The in-year overspend for the High Needs Block was £1,322,188. The particular areas of overspend were outlined in the report.

Representatives were advised that due to this accumulating deficit in the High Needs Block, Halton has been included in tranche 3 of the DfE's *Delivering Better Value* (DBV) Programme. Further details of this will be brought to the Forum at the October meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Schools Forum

- 1) note the overall deficit balance of DSG from 2022-23 of £2,892,585, is carried forward into the 2023-34 financial year; and
- 2) note the continuing pressures on the High Needs Block, resulting in an in year overspend of £1,322,188.

Financial
Management,
HBC

SCF23 SCHOOL BALANCES 2022-23

The Forum considered a report of the Operational Director – Finance, which reported the level of Revenue and Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) funding brought forward from 2022-23 by Halton's Maintained Schools.

Whilst balances were still required to be reported to the Schools Forum, no excess surplus balance limits were currently in place. Despite this, the Forum retained the right to require schools to provide further information as to how their balance will be spent, should they so decide.

Representatives were referred to Appendix A, which showed the Revenue balances for each maintained school, along with their 2021-22 balance for comparison. It was noted that the net surplus schools budget balances position for Halton's maintained schools, at the end of 2022-23 was £7,306,885. This was a decrease of £226,306 (3%) when

compared to last year.

Appendix B of the report showed the Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) balances for each maintained school, along with their 2021-22 balance for comparison. This showed an increase of £449,471 to £657,380 at the end of 2022-23.

One Representative requested clarity as to why some schools' carry over balances were so high. In particular, those schools that had presented consistently high carryovers for the past few years and those that had a 12% or above figure.

In response it was agreed that transparency was important across the board and some explanations were provided relating to some schools high balances. In relation to academy balances, it was possible to report these to the Forum but they would be lagged, due to them having a September to August financial year.

It was commented that a more strategic approach to reducing the High Needs deficit was required and it was suggested that some excess carryover money could be used for this. The Forum discussed the potential of the DBV Programme in relation to this suggestion and Finance Officers would explore this as a possibility during their work with the DfE.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum note the report and comments made.

Financial
Management,
HBC

SCF24 SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS 2023

The Forum received the latest version of Halton Scheme for Financing Schools (SFFS), as updated for 2023; this document was appended to the report.

Applicable to Maintained schools only, it was reported that the Department for Education (DfE) had not issued any *Directed Revisions* or material updates since the last Scheme, approved for 2021, so there were no revisions that required consultation with schools for 2023.

The updates to Annexes A and E as outlined in the report were agreed. Finance Officers would prepare a summary and circulate to schools.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

Financial
Management,
HBC

- 1) note the report and approve the updates; and
- 2) agree to the latest version being made available, as statutorily required, to all Maintained schools and on the Council's website for public inspection.

Meeting ended at 4.50 p.m.