

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 11 October 2023 held remotely

Present: Councillor T. McInerney (Observer)
A. Jones, Democratic Services, HBC
N Shafiq, Financial Management, HBC
J. Farrell, Education, Inclusion & Provision
B. Barton, 16-19 Provision
J. Robertson, Small Primary School Representative
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
J. Wilson, Secondary Governor Representative
E. Haver, Special Academy Representative
A. Sheppard, VA Schools Representative
C. Dalton, Secondary Academy Representative

Action

SCF25 APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

SCF26 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

SCF27 MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

The Operational Director – Education, Inclusion and Provision, provided the Forum with a verbal update on the current membership of the Forum as follows:

- A Primary Academy Representative had been canvassed for with no response so this remains vacant;
- A Primary Governor Representative had been canvassed with one response received, which would be shared with all Governors to agree;
- Vacancies still existed for:
 - Secondary Academy Representative;
 - Secondary with a 6th Form Representative; and
 - Early Years PVI.

RESOLVED: That the update be received.

Operational
Director -
Education,
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SCF28 PROVISIONAL DSG FUNDING FOR 2024-25

The Forum was presented with the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) provisional funding for 2024-25.

Officers advised that since publication of the agenda, the Department for Education (DfE) has provided website links to updated tables with the overall figures, resulting in Halton's settlement being reduced by just under £1m.

The provisional DSG settlement for 2024-25 was £140,756,493 for the Schools Block, Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) and High Needs Block. However, this had now been reduced to an amount of £139,780,11.

To update, as stated in the report included on the agenda, the Schools Block provisional allocation was £112,914,268, based on the October 2022 census data which was an increase of £2.722m or 2.5% when compared to the actual Schools Block allocation for 2023-24 – however this is now £111,937,785, which is an increase of 1.61%, rather than the 2.5% stated initially. Further, inclusive of the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG), the Primary Unit of Funding (PUF) and Secondary Unit of Funding (SUF) had been reduced to £5,497 for Primary and £6,950 for Secondary. The PUF and SUF were to be confirmed in December following receipt of the October 2023 census information.

It was noted that individual budgets being funded from the CSSB for 2024-25 would be presented at the January meeting of the Forum and the High Needs Block budgets would be presented at the February meeting.

The DfE had indicated that the Early Years Block provisional settlement for 2024-25 would be announced in December 2023.

It was proposed to continue to follow the National Funding Formula (NFF), using the NFF cash values where possible. The NFF formula values being proposed for Halton's school funding formula were detailed at Appendix A, together with the NFF methods, principles and rules. The Forum was requested to recommend the use of all NFF values for the determination of schools and academies formula funding for 2024-25, noting that any affordability issues would be brought back to the January 2024 meeting of the Forum for final recommendation. The Forum agreed to continue with the NFF values being proposed, with the NFF methods, principles and rules outlined in the Appendix.

It was reported that the level of Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) could not be set until after the October 2023 census data and final grant allocation for 2024-25 was received, however it was envisaged that the maximum 0.5% MFG will be applied, as in previous years. The Forum was requested to recommend in principle therefore, that 0.5% be applied, noting that any affordability issues would be brought back to the January 2024 meeting of the Forum, for final recommendation. This was agreed.

RESOLVED: That the Schools Forum:

- 1) note the report and update regarding the DfE's notification of a discrepancy with the overall DSG settlement;
- 2) support the continuation of the National Funding Formula (NFF) methods, principles and rules for mainstream primary and secondary school funding allocations for 2024-25;
- 3) agree the NFF unit values as presented in Appendix A be applied to mainstream schools and academies funding formula for 2024-25; and
- 4) agree to a 0.5% MFG level in principle.

Financial
Management,
HBC

SCF29 SEND CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATES

The Forum received an update from the Operational Director – Education, Inclusion and Provision, on the progress of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Capital Programme linked to the 2022 SEND Sufficiency Strategy.

Halton was allocated £3.3m of capital funding (High Needs Provision Capital Allocation) from the DfE to support the provision of new places or to expand existing provision for pupils and students with high needs. Schools were then invited to submit expressions of interest to offer new or additional SEND provision at their school, based on need identified with the Local Authority.

The activities carried out since this and details of schools that were given approval to progress with new provision, or expand existing provision were outlined. During the summer term, feasibility work was carried out across the schools and work was planned or had already started.

Following questions, it was reported that an additional 97 places would be available for future SEND pupils once the new provisions were operating. The Forum was advised that only one expression of interest was received from the secondary sector, but noted that some academies would be developing their own SEND provision. The Special School Academy Representative raised concerns that the lack of future secondary SEND provision would cause pressures.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report is noted; and
- 2) Schools Forum representatives be informed of the SEND capital position and planned increase for resource base provision during the academic year 2023-24.

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SCF30 DELIVERING BETTER VALUES (DBV) PROGRAMME

The Forum received a report from the Operational Director – Education, Inclusion and Provision, which provided an update on the Delivering Better Values (DBV) Programme across the Borough.

Halton had been identified by the Department for Education (DfE) to participate in its DBV Programme due to the high needs Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) overspend position. The Local Authority was working with *Newton Europe* and *CIPFA* (who were commissioned by the Government to lead the DBV Programme), to identify the causes of high needs overspend and then apply for up to £1m funding to then take steps to reduce the high needs DSG overspend, by planning and implementing long term system change.

The report outlined the activities carried out so far to help identify these causes and analysis results across the primary and secondary sectors were presented.

The Forum was advised that case reviews were currently ongoing and surveys had been shared and were available on the Local Offer for parents/carers, education and wider professionals, and children and young people to complete and return – Schools Forum Representatives were encouraged to complete surveys.

It was noted that engagement from all stakeholder groups was vital to gain a representative understanding of experience and how practice across the system could

improve and help reduce high needs spend. All this information from stakeholder groups and the data analysis would then be shared with Newton Europe and CIPFA to identify a potential trajectory. Focussed priorities for action would form a part of the DBV grant application process and would be submitted through December.

Representatives discussed the Programme and made the following observations:

- It was felt that some national funding pressures contributed to the high needs overspend position;
- Following staff training events on the Programme with other local authority colleagues, it was evident that many common issues were being experienced across the Country;
- A query regarding referrals to *Chatterbug* – procurement of the Speech and Language Therapy Service contract was in progress, however referrals could still be made to *Chatterbug* and these would be transferred to the new provider once appointment is mobilised;
- The same application process applied to requesting an EHCP whether it was school led or parent led. They were also assessed under the same criteria; and
- Analysis on where EHCP applications came from was made and showed that there was a small increase in parental requests but not a significant one.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) note the report;
- 2) understand the need to engage fully with the DBV Programme in order to identify and implement long term system change to help alleviate financial risk and overspend; and
- 3) encourage education, Early Years colleagues, wider stakeholders, parents/carers and children and young people with SEND to engage with Newton Europe and CIPFA, to share views and experiences to inform diagnostic position and shape grant application process and system change as part of the DBV programme.

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Meeting ended at 4.45 p.m.