

## SCHOOLS FORUM

*At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 22 January 2025 at The Board Room - Municipal Building, Widnes*

Present: Councillor T. McInerney (Observer)  
A. Jones, Democratic Services, HBC  
N. Shafiq, Financial Management, HBC  
Z. Fearon, Children's Services, HBC  
B. Holmes, Education, Inclusion and Provision  
G. Bradbury, Financial Management, HBC  
N. Hunt, (Chair) Pupil Referral Unit Representative  
J. Wilson, Secondary Governor Representative  
J. Jardine, All Through School Representative  
M. Tudor, Secondary Academy Representative  
M. Deeney, Secondary Academy Representative  
J. O'Connor, PVI Representative  
J. Coughlan, Primary Representative - Infant School  
J. Thompson, Community Special Schools Representative  
A. Sheppard, VA Schools Representative  
B. Barton, 16-19 Provision Representative  
S. Ainsworth, Special Academy Schools Representative

Also in attendance: Two members of the public

*Action*

### SCF14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Karl Landrum – Primary Schools with a Nursery, Michelle Slingsby – Primary Academies, Russell Houghton – Primary Governor, Cathy Liku – Community Nursery Schools, Kathryn Evans – Secondary Academy with a 6<sup>th</sup> Form and Joanne Robertson – Small Primary Schools.

### SCF15 MINUTES

A correction was required as follows:

SCF11 – Excess Schools Balances – fifth paragraph from the top of page 3 should read: “*recommended 5% for secondary and 8% for primary*”

Other than this the minutes from the meeting held on 16 October 2024, were agreed as a correct record.

## SCF16 DSG AND SCHOOLS' FUNDING FOR 2025-26

The Forum considered a report from the Director of Finance, which gave the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding settlement for 2025-26 and the implications of this for individual Halton schools budgets.

The DSG for 2025-26 was £168.551m, which was broken down as follows, with the current year's final figures shown in brackets for context):

Schools Block	£117.883m	(£111.188)m
Central Schools Services Block	£ 0.765m	(£ 0.751)m
High Needs Block	£ 29.267m	(£ 27.079)m
Early Years Block	£ 20.686m	(£ 15.114)m

It was noted that this was an overall increase of £14.419m, from the £154.133m allocated for 2024-25. Further, from the 2025-26 allocation an estimated £3.806m will be recouped by the Department for Education (DfE), from the High Needs Block. This was for academies and other educational establishments for the commissioned High Needs Place funding and would reduce the High Needs Block allocation to £25.451m.

The report provided explanations on the allocations for each of the above Blocks. The final National Funding Formula (NFF) factor values were illustrated in appendix A.

The Forum was requested to support the continuation of the NFF methods, principles and rules for mainstream primary and secondary school funding allocations and de-delegation for 2025-26, after taking note of the mitigation proposals outlined in paragraph 3.4 (a, b, c and d) to address the funding shortfall of £179,488, explained in paragraph 3.3. The de-delegation proposals were outlined in paragraph 3.6, and the Forum was asked to consider de-delegation for Contingencies, Free School Meals eligibility checking; and staff costs supply cover.

Forum Members were also requested to agree the level of Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to be applied to the Schools Block funding formula for 2025-26. The rationale for the recommended rate of 0% was explained in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5.

Representatives discussed the proposal to reduce the basic primary per pupil factor which was recommended by officers as being the least disruptive to schools (option d). It

was felt that this was preferable to reducing lump sums, which would affect smaller schools more. During discussions the following comments/concerns were made:

- It was disappointing not to have the individual schools budget breakdown information which had been shared with the Forum previously, so that comparisons could be made with previous years;
- A shortfall in funding like this has not happened for many years in Halton, so some Representatives present had not seen this before. It was understood however that the deficit situation had to be shared with the Forum so that a decision could be made on how this amount would be clawed back;
- Overall pupil numbers in primary and secondary schools had reduced and were continuing to do so. So some schools would be affected more than others, due to losing funding from reducing numbers and now having reduced funding due to this deficit situation; and
- It was disappointing to see that the Pupil Premium Grants had only been increased for Early Years.

In response to concerns over not sharing the individual schools' budgets at the meeting, Officers advised that the timeline for the submission of the Authority Proforma Tool (APT) was today, and therefore the Forum was being asked to agree the NFF in principle, so that the submission could be made following the meeting. It was also explained that if the recommended clawback method was rejected today in favour of a different one, the individual schools figures would change, so it was prudent to wait until the decision of the Forum was made.

Those eligible Representative of the Forum voted for option (d) to recover the shortfall – to reduce the basic primary per pupil factor, in line with the recommendation. They also agreed that a 0% MFG be applied to the Schools Block funding formula. In relation to the de-delegated funds, maintained Representatives voted to agree those funds proposed.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

- 1) note the report;
- 2) supports the continuation of the National Funding Formula (NFF) methods, principles and rules for mainstream primary and secondary school funding allocations and de-delegation for 2025-26, noting the

mitigation proposals; and

- 3) agrees the level of Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) at 0% to be applied to the Schools Block funding formula for 2025-26.

*Meeting ended at 5.10 p.m.*