

Meeting of the Schools Forum

Thursday 3rd November 2016 at 1.30 p.m.
at Bedford High School

Present:

Members: A.P. Hardy (Chair) E. Loftus, S. Bruen, V. Birchall, G. Hayes, H. Phillips, A. Birchall, A. McGlown, R. Halford, A. Isherwood, R. Lewis and A Wells.

Observers: M. Atkins and M. Wilkinson.

LA Officers: A. Lindsay (Assistant Director) J. McDonald (Strategic Finance Manager) C. Myers (Finance Group Manager) and F. Gore (Clerk)

1. Appointment of Chair for 2016-17

It was agreed: That Mr A. Hardy be appointed Chair of the Forum for 2016-17.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair for 2016-17

It was agreed: That Mr A. Birchall be appointed Vice-Chair of the Forum for 2016-17.

3. Membership 2016-17

It was noted that there had been no change in membership since the last meeting.

4. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from F. Quinlivan, D. Winstanley, K Pilkington, J. Holland, P. McGhee and T. Warren; and from Cllr J. Platt,

5. Items for inclusion under AOB

None.

6. Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 7 July 2016: enclosed.

It was agreed: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2016 be approved as a true and correct record.

Matters Arising

Date of Future Meetings:

It was noted that the planned meeting of the Forum on 6 July 2017 would clash with the WASCL Conference.

It was agreed: That a revised date be agreed (see minute 10 below)

7 High Needs

a. Financial Position:

Mr McDonald presented a report (circulated prior to the meeting) on the reasons for the significantly increased pressures on the High Needs Block in the current financial year and projected pressures in 2017-18 and beyond. Information on how other Local Authorities had addressed the deficit was reported and a proposal to address the deficit and set a balanced budget in this financial year and in 2017-18 was outlined.

School representatives referred to the significant budget pressures that schools faced and that any proposal to move money from the School Block to the High Needs Block would seriously impact on schools. The pressure on schools was recognised by the LA, however the current deficit had to be addressed and arrangements made so that a balanced budget could be agreed for 2017-18.

Reference was made to the potential to use Early Years funding to support the High Needs Block and members emphasised that any decision to transfer money from the Schools Block should not be seen as setting a precedent for future decisions regarding SEN funding.

Mr McDonald confirmed that there was time to await information from the DfE on the High Needs Block before a decision was taken on setting a balanced budget for 2017-18.

It was agreed: (1) That approval be given to the use of centrally held DSG and Early Years reserves to fund the High Needs deficit in 2016-17.

(2) That a decision on how to address the projected deficit in the High Needs Block in 2017-18 be deferred to the next meeting.

(3) That indicative school budgets for 2017-18 be issued to schools as soon as possible but they be informed of the potential for funding to be reduced should a decision be made to transfer money from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.

b. Inclusion – Future Proposals:

Mr Lindsay reported on proposals put forward by the LA to address the issues discussed above and circulated at the meeting information on proposed revisions in SEND provision across the borough. The proposals were now the subject of consultation with schools and would continue to be developed over time.

Members referred to the time limited funding arrangements relating to any proposed Free School; the potential to increase income for Post 16 SEN students; and the funding required to establish three Hubs as now reported.

It was anticipated that after the cost of investment in the new model, the new delivery model would achieve savings through reduced out of Borough placements and by giving schools increased capacity to respond to the needs of SEN pupils. Without the changes proposed it was anticipated that costs would continue to rise which would place increased pressures on the school budgets in future years.

Reference was made to the impact of the new model on future staffing needs and that school would require the necessary lead-in period so that staffing changes could be managed.

It was agreed: That the information be noted and Ms C. Peeling be invited to give a presentation to the next meeting on progress in developing the new model.

8. Schools Funding Formula 2017/18:

Mr Myers presented a report (circulated prior to the meeting) on the proposed funding formula allocation and principles for the setting of school budgets 2017-18. Details of the allowable factors under the Schools Funding Formula were reported.

Reference was made to the impact on academies of changes in the way in which the Schools Block Unit of Funding (SBUF) was allocated. Mr Myers confirmed that this would be a matter for the DfE to determine and a decision on this and other matters in the Formula were awaited.

It was recommended that the Growth Fund be increased in 2017-18 to reflect the increasing pressures on a number of schools which needed to grow to meet basic need. A representative noted that unless schools were confident that their budget would increase to reflect the full cost of growth then there was an increased likelihood that they would not agree to proposals by the LA for growth.

A question was asked about the cost of the Forum and Mr Myers reported on the attributable costs. The budget would remain at the reported level and any underspend would be recycled back to schools via reserves.

It was also noted that the centrally held DSG included Early Years.

It was agreed: (1) That the report be accepted and the following changes be adopted for 2017-18:

- a. the disapplication of the Split Site Factor;
- b. the Deprivation Factors be based on the cash value as at 2016-17

(2) That all gains by schools as a result of the formula, be scaled back by a percentage to meet the MFG target for schools that have lost by more than 1.5%.

(3) That the primary:secondary spending ratio of 1:1.30 be retained for 2017-18.

(4) That an allocation of £500,000 be made to the growth fund in 2017-18.

(5) That the allocation of £100,000 to the fund to support schools with falling rolls be maintain for 2017-18.

(6) That approval be given to the following de-delegated services in 2017-18:

De-Delegated Service based on estimated NOR Sept 16	Budget 2016/17 £	Proposed Budget 2017/18 £	£ per pupil
Contingencies (including schools in financial difficulties and deficits of closing schools)	300,000	300,000	
Behaviour Support Services Primary Only	665,650	665,650	
Support to underperforming ethnic groups & bilingual learners	455,817	455,817	
FSM eligibility	16,803	16,803	
Insurance	6,095	6,095	
Staff Costs - Trade Union Public Duties	271,349	271,349	
	1,715,714	1,715,714	

(7) That with regard to centrally retained services the following provisions be made in 2017-18

- a. Co-ordinated admissions £0.138m
- b. Servicing of the Schools Forum £0.036m

(8) That a decision on the funding of the High Needs Block be made at the next meeting.

9. AOB

None.

10. Future Meetings: (all meetings to commence at 1.30 p.m.)

It was agreed: That the following revised schedule of meetings be agreed.:

- 12th January 2017 - at Bedford High School
- 9th March 2017 - at Bedford High School
- 11th May 2017 - at Hawkley Hall High School
- 29th June 2017 - at Hawkley Hall High School

Meeting closed at 2.40 p.m.