

Meeting of the Schools Forum
Thursday 12th January 2017 at 1.30 p.m.
at Bedford High School

Present:

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

Observers: Cllr J. Platt and M. Atkins.

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

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from F. Quinlivan, D. Winstanley and T. Warren; and from M. Wilkinson and S. Bodey,

2. Items for inclusion under AOB

None.

3. 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.

4. Schools Funding Formula 2017-18.

Mr Myers presented a report (circulated prior to the meeting) informing members of the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) allocation 2017-18 and confirming the approach taken with regard to the submitted funding pro-forma (these were set out in detail at Appendix A to the report).

Due to the increase in pupil numbers Wigan's total DSG Schools Block allocation had increased to £197,598,541, with a total Funding For Schools Block of £196,388,174 after reductions to meet approved centrally retained services.

Appendix B to the report gave the indicative budgets for each school for 2017-18 subject to approval of the pro-forma tool by the DfE.

Reference was made to discussions held at the last meeting on increased pressures on the High Needs Block and further information on this was provided (see minute 5A below)

It was also reported that the government had published the response to stage 1 of the National Funding Formula alongside stage 2 for consultation. The deadline for response was 22nd of March. The transition year of 2018/19 would allow Local Authorities to continue to set a local formula with the hard formula being introduced from 2019/20.

It was agreed: (1) That the report be accepted and the submission of the funding pro-forma as set out at Appendix A be confirmed.

(2) That a meeting of the Forum be held on 15th February, commencing at 10.00 a.m. to discuss the NFF consultation and provide an appropriate response and a more detailed report be issued for that meeting.

5. High Needs Block 2017/18

A. Financial Position:

Mr Myers presented a report (circulated prior to the meeting) informing members that the Department for Education (DfE) had issued the 2017/18 Dedicated School Grant (DSG) allocations in December 2016 for the Schools Block, High Needs Block and Early Years Block. The allocation for Wigan with regard to the High Needs Block was £27.446m. This compared with the 2016/17 High Needs Block funding of £26.473m. This included Post 16 Funding paid direct to institutions, resourced units and AP provision in academies. The estimated figure after these deductions was £23.531m.

The increase in allocation was due to the DfE awarding an additional £130 million of funding which has been distributed across all local authorities, using a methodology based on population and future growth. Wigan had been awarded an extra £0.600m for 2017/18.

Further to the discussions at the last meeting on increased pressures for High Needs provision, the extra £0.600m funding alongside a review of services and charging policy would now allow the Authority to set a balanced budget for 2017/18. The position would continue to be closely monitored.

A member asked how the new charging arrangements would work? Ms Pealing reported that for placements in alternative provision pro-rata funding based on the Age Weighted Pupil Unit would be adopted and met from the host school.

Ms Pealing reported that there was an on-going review of outreach services which currently supported SEN pupils in mainstream settings and there was a strategic review of SEN provision in the Borough (minute 5B below refers). The LA recognised that it would be necessary to generate additional income in respect of SEN support services in order to support the High Needs Block.

A revised budget for the High Needs Block for 2017/18 was given in the report.

It was agreed: That the report be accepted.

B. Inclusion – Future Proposals:

Ms C. Pealing (Service Manager) reported on the progress of the strategic review of SEN provision in the Borough (a copy of planned model of provision was circulated at the meeting).

Alternative models had been considered and discussed with schools and the outcome of a submission to the DfE to approve the establishment of an SEMH free school in the Borough was awaited. If the application proved to be unsuccessful then alternative funding models would be considered.

It was agreed: That the update be noted and further updates be given at future meetings of the Forum.

6. Early Years National Funding Formula Update:

Members were informed that the Schools Forum must be consulted on the formula for Early Years. There was a requirement to sign this off by the 28th of February 2017, however it had not be possible to produce the finance data and report for this meeting as there was an on-going consultation with providers which was only due back on 11th January. It was suggested that this matter be discussed in detail at the planned meeting on 15th February.

A representative reminded members that not all settings would receive an increase in funding and that maintained nursery schools faced particular challenges due to a planned reduction in the universal base rate and the demands placed on them as opposed to PVI providers. It was important that actions were taken to protect the sustainability of all settings.

Mr McDonald confirmed that he would issue further information prior to the planned meeting on 15th February to help inform the discussions at that meeting.

It was agreed: That the consultation on the Early Years Funding Formula be discussed at a meeting of the Forum to be held on 15 February 2017.

7. National Funding Formula (NFF) Update:

Members were informed that the second phase of the NFF consultation had been issued and the deadline for responses 22 March 2017. It was suggested that the Forum consider the proposals in detail and report back to the planned meeting of the Forum on 9 March 2017.

Members were informed that under the proposed changes the LA would drop from the 72nd poorest funded LA in the country to the 109th poorly funded. Cllr Platt reported that the Council had discussed this matter and would shortly issue a communication on the anticipated impact of the new Formula.

Members commented that whilst the new Formula disadvantaged the Borough a more fundamental problem was a lack of resource in the system nationally and that schools were having to fund significant increases (now and in the future) in staff related costs and non-staff items without any additional resources.

It was agreed: (1) That the consultation on the National Funding Formula be discussed at a meeting of the Forum to be held on 15 February 2017.

(2) That Mr McDonald be asked to circulate a summary document prior to the above mentioned meeting summarizing the proposals and their implications for Wigan schools.

(3) That schools in the Borough be encouraged to respond directly to the DfE consultation on the NFF; and the Forum also respond on behalf of all schools following discussion at the meeting on 15th February.

8. AOB

None.

9. Future Meetings:

15th February 2017 at 10.00 a.m - at Hawkley Hall High School

9th March 2017 at 1.30 p.m - at Bedford High School

11th May 2017 at 1.30 p.m - at Hawkley Hall High School

29th June 2017 at 1.30 p.m - at Hawkley Hall High School

Meeting closed at 2.15 p.m.