

# **Minutes of the Meeting of the Schools Forum**

**Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017 at 1.30 p.m.  
at Hawkley Hall High School**

## **Present:**

**Members:** A.P. Hardy (Chair) E. Ellis, G. Hayes, H. Phillips, A. Birchall, A. McGlown, A. Isherwood, J. Holland, P. McGhee, C. Taylor, T. Warren and A. Wells.

**Observers:** Cllr J. Bullen and M. Atkins.

**LA Officers:** A. Lindsay (Assistant Director) C. Pealing (Service Manager) J. McDonald (Strategic Finance Manager) A. Meehan (Principal Auditor) V Lowe, M. Stockwell and A. Bellamy (HR) and F. Gore (Clerk)

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from E. Loftus, V. Birchall, F. Quinlivan, D. Winstanley, R. Halford, R. Lewis and from M. Wilkinson and K. Winnard.

### **2. Items for inclusion under AOB**

None.

### **3. Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 21 September 2017**

**It was agreed:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2017 be approved as a true and correct record.

### **Matters Arising**

None.

### **4. High Needs:**

Members were reminded that at the last meeting it had been agreed that the likely financial implications for the primary and secondary sectors of top-slicing school budgets to meet the projected shortfall in the High Needs Budget 2017-18 be reported to the next meeting of the Forum. Mr McDonald presented a report giving the above information based on a projected deficit of £750,000 for the financial year. This equated to £17 per pupil in primary and secondary schools.

At the last meeting it had been suggested that the projected deficit in 2017-18 be met from school balances held by the Council and then recouped from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding in 2018-19. If the structural problems continued thereafter a similar arrangement could then operate until such time as the High Needs Budget was sufficient to meet demand.

Representatives referred to the on-going pressures on school budgets and it might not be possible to use DSG funding to support the High Needs Budget in future

years. It was important that means were found of addressing the shortfall in the High Needs Budget in the longer term.

Ms Peeling reported that from April 2018 mainstream schools would be charged for placing pupils in specialist provision. The LA was working with school to carry out a strategic review of provision; adopt a more equitable charging policy; identify new providers and to invest in specialist provision. However demand for places in special schools continued to grow as did demand for alternative provision.

Mr Lindsay reported that the LA recognised the problems that would be created for schools if there was any move to take money from schools mid-year and that the proposed approach gave additional time to develop the new strategic approach to address the issues previously discussed.

The special school representative reminded colleagues that the funding required was for children most in need of additional support. It was essential that a strategic plan was in place to ensure there was both sufficient special school places and sufficient funding in place. The problems caused by the uncertainty surrounding the allocation of funds to special schools at the start of the 2017-18 financial year would need to be avoided in the future.

**It was agreed:** (1) That that the projected deficit in the High Needs Budget 2017-18 be met from school balances held by the Council and then recouped from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding in 2018-19.

(2) That reports continue to be presented to this Group on the High Needs Strategic Review.

## **5. National Funding Formula:**

Further to the decision taken at the last meeting it had been agreed not to hold a meeting of the Funding Working Group until such time as there was sufficient information available to allow a detailed assessment of the impact of the proposed revised National Funding Formula (NFF) for school.

The Chair reported that it had become clear at a recent national Conference on the NFF that a number of Local Authorities had decided to retain their existing funding formula in 2018-19. This was an option Wigan could adopt if it so wished.

Representatives referred to the inclusion on the new NFF to a “minimum per pupil funding “ element and it would be useful to see the impact of the proposed changes and to compare the 2018-19 school budgets using the existing funding formula and the new formula.

Mr McDonald reported that there would be a significant amount of work required to produce the comparative information now requested; and that a decision would be required by late January 2018 on the funding formula to be adopted for 2018-19.

**It was agreed:** (1) That a Working Group comprising Mr A. Hardy (Chair); Ms E. Ellis (primary sector); Mr A. McGlown (secondary sector); Ms E. Loftus (special schools sector) and Mr R. Halford (academy schools representative) - or their representatives - be convened at 10.30 a.m. on Thursday 7 December at Orrell St Peter’s RC High School.

(2) That the Working Group be asked to consider the potential impact of the technical guidance to be issued on the NFF and make recommendations to the January 2018 meeting of the Forum.

## **6. School Contract Standing Orders.**

Mr Meehan (Principal Auditor - Contracts) presented a report on proposed new procurement rules for LA maintained schools, which would replace the existing Standing Orders relating to Contracts. A copy of the proposed revised Standing Orders was also circulated.

Representatives broadly welcomed the proposed changes but expressed concern at the adverse impact of a proposal to reduce the contract value at which three quotations were required from £10,000 to £5,000.

**It was agreed:** (1) That, subject to the contract value at which three quotations are required remaining at £10,000, the revised School Contract Standing Orders as now reported be endorsed; and they be reported to schools for adoption at the autumn term 2018 Governing Body meeting.

(2) If the LA decide not to agree the amendment as now requested a further report be presented to the Forum before seeking to introduce the proposed changes.

## **7. Apprenticeships.**

Ms Lowe and Mr Stockwell (HR) presented a report on the Apprenticeship Levy and the proposed process for schools to access the levy funds. The LA wished to appoint an Apprenticeship Levy Steering Group to develop a strategic plan for the allocation of funding so that funds could be awarded from September 2018. The LA would seek to work with both levy-paying and non-levy paying schools to help them access funding available through the levy or from national government.

Representatives noted that the funding was time limited to two years (based on an annual rolling programme) and there were a number of conditions attached to how the funding was used to contribute to the costs of new apprenticeships and help upskill existing employees.

It was noted that the Systems Leadership Group had discussed leadership pathways and it would be important that that Group and the Apprenticeship Levy Steering Group work closely to establish pathways that met the highest possible standards.

It was noted that the Church Authorities had their own arrangements in place and the LA was asked to ensure that the terminology used in any future work on this accurately reflected the status of employees employed by schools and those employed by the LA.

**It was agreed:** (1) That the opportunities available to schools from the Apprenticeship Levy and national funding be welcomed.

(2) That an update be given to a future meeting of the Forum.

(3) That a short briefing paper be prepared for submission to the primary and secondary sector cluster groups with a view to identifying volunteers to sit on the Apprenticeship Levy Steering Group.

**8. AOB**

None.

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

11<sup>th</sup> January 2018 - at Bedford High School

22 March 2018 - at Bedford High School

10<sup>th</sup> May 2018 – at Hawkley Hall High School

21<sup>st</sup> June 2018 - at Bedford High School