

Schools Forum Meeting
Held on Thursday 16th May 2019
At Bedford High School

Draft Minutes

Members Present:

A.Hardy (Chair), E. Ellis, F.Quinlivan, V. Birchall, K.Ward, T. Cunningham, H.Phillips, A. McGlown, L.Loftus, A. Isherwood, M.Atkins

Observers: M. Wilkinson, Cllr J Bullen,

In Attendance: J. McDonald (Strategic Finance Manager), A.Meehan (Group Finance Manager), M. Larkin (Clerk)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:

G. Hayes, A.Birchall, R.Lewis, JA. Hewitt, T.Warren

2. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION UNDER AOB

- Message from Cllr Bullen

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was agreed: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7th March 2019 be approved as a true and correct record.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. DSG OUTTURN 2018/19

The DSG Outturn position report for 2018/19 had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Mr Meehan highlighted:

- School balances had increase by £1.454m
- There was an underspend of £681,000 in the Early Years Block which would be transferred to reserves and used to support future spending plans and pressures within this area, including sufficiency and volatility.
- The final outturn position for the overspend in the High Needs Block was confirmed as £1.116m, this had been due to increased numbers of EHC statements in mainstream schools, extra places required within special schools and the need to use more independent provision.

- There had been underspends in relation to central funding on contingency and across other de-delegated and central services, totalling £243,000. This would be ring fenced for mainstream schools.
- The Council did not currently operate a claw back scheme in regard to school balances.
- A summary of all school balances as at 31/03/2019 was as follows:

Balances	Nursery & Primary (£)	Secondary (£)	Special (£)	Total (£)
As at 31/3/18	8,427,239	3,978,887	706,261	13,112,387
As at 31/3/19	8,620,606	5,052,661	893,548	14,566,815
Annual Increase / Decrease (+/-)	193,367	1,073,774	187,287	1,454,427
Annual % Increase / Decrease (+)	2.29%	26.99%	26.52%	11.09%

Number of Schools	83	11	6	100
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Average Balance 31/3/18	103,863	459,333	148,925	145,668
Average Annual Increase	2,330	97,616	31,215	14,544

- It was noted there had been an increase in balances for each sector, the overall increase in Primary School balances was relatively small in comparison with Secondary and Special Schools.
- A significant proportion of the £1.454m balances was related to just 5 schools, (3 Secondary, 1 Primary and 1 Special) which had generated in-year surpluses in excess of £100K

Q. A question was raised as to exceptional reasons for these schools accumulating higher balances.

A. Mr Meehan inform the Forum, one school had undergone restructuring and had made significant savings, no particular reasons had been identified for the other schools.

A review of schools carrying balances in excess of 15% of their budget had been undertaken and summarised below:

Area of Spend	Value of Spend (£)	% use of balances
In year staffing costs	890,970	16%
Refurbishment/Repairs	1,351,806	24%
Supplies and Services	823,817	14%
IT Equipment	85,358	1%
Contingency/Uncommitted	2,580,395	45%
Totals	5,732,346	100%

Mr Meehan continued

- Termly visits from Autumn would be planned to those schools carrying significant balances
- It was acknowledged several schools were well below the recommended 15% excess balances
- There was an awareness that the higher percentage held in contingency/uncommitted spending had been placed there to support future predicated deficit budgets
- It was acknowledged that a vast majority of schools with the Borough would not be able to set a balanced budget for 2020/21 despite using their balances
- It was stated 40 schools had increased their budgets and 39 schools had been using their balances to support their budgets

Q. A question was raised about the number of schools not being able to set balanced budgets this year.

A. It was reported some Primary School's had been accessing the licensed deficit scheme this year.

The Chair suggested the use of a median range opposed to averages and requested figures for the percentage of schools forecasting that they could not reach a balanced budget in 2020/21.

Mr Meehan informed Forum members a 3-year predicted budget exercise would be run during the Autumn term to provide a clear picture.

A member raised concerns over the provision being provided for current pupils and what impact the holding back of spending to make savings would be having, in order to prevent issues in the upcoming years. This raised discussion about HT's concerns over the decisions particularly in regard to staffing, the actions they were having to take now and the impact this may have in future years.

Information was shared regarding a letter sent to the Secretary of State for Education and the response received from the Minister for Schools Standards. The Chair informed members a template would be shared at Governors Forum and suggested HT's and Governors discuss this at their Full Governing Board meetings.

It was brought to members attention that although schools balances were showing increases this was masking the actual picture of the issue's schools were facing in relation to funding.

It was acknowledged some schools had carried out a restructuring process and decisions had been taken not to replace some staff members who had left over the past 12 to 18 months. Discussion took place regarding the impact on the reducing staff levels, the increase of class sizes, the physical capacities within schools, nurture

provision, increases in behaviour issues, fixed term exclusions and the need for alternative provision

Q. A question was asked to the Finance Officers in relation to Academy finances and if 3-year predicated budgets were seen by the LA.

A. Mr Meehan informed members this information was not shared with the LA and that the ESFA were responsible for scrutinising the Academy budgets and balances.

The Chair raised a proposal for requests to be made to Academies to share this information in order for transparency.

It was agreed: Requests would be made from the Schools Forum for the sharing of 3-year budget forecasts from Academies.

5. Central Funding Update 2019/20

A report regarding the Central Funding allocation for 2019/20 had been circulated prior to the meeting it was highlighted:

- In relation to growth £0.75m had been allocated to schools through a business case system
- In regard to Disproportionate SEN there was a formula for a high proportion of plans and an additional £98,189 had been allocated
- It was expected the full £150,000 allocated for Disproportionate SEN would be spent
- £200,000 had been allocated to contingency funding and negotiation was ongoing with a couple of schools in regard to this funding

The Chair suggested a report be provided to Schools Forum highlighting the anticipated growth and suggested plans of how the LA intended to accommodate this growth.

Discussion took place in relation to the impending closure of the UTC and the impact this may have on schools and funding for approximately 30 pupils, 20% of which were SEND. Members were informed the Assistant Director for Education was in discussion with the DfE and the UTC.

It was agreed:

- (1) Schools Forum agreed any unspent growth funding to be carried forward and held in reserve to support future growth
- (2) School Admissions to present a report on place planning to a future meeting

6. Update on High Needs Pressures

Mr McDonald informed members:

- The budget had been set and additional requests for 12 Primary places had been received for 2019/20, at a cost of £150k
- A request had been received for an extra £100k to support specialist ASD provision at Hope School
- 94 new EHCP's were being assessed
- An additional place had been requested at Rowan Tree
- 24 children within the Borough were being home tutored at a cost of £8,400 per week, amounting to over £300,000 per year

Mr McDonald stated a more detailed report would be provided in the Autumn term along with reports from the task and finish groups.

Some members shared their experiences from the task and finish groups, stating some progress had been made, but no specific plans had yet been formulated, there was still lots of work to be done. Representation at the task and finish groups was discussed and it was agreed there was a need for updates from the groups.

It was agreed: Mr McDonald would contact Rachel Derbyshire to request a list of meetings, attendees and any papers which could be shared.

It was highlighted by a member that there was no specialised provision for Early Years within the Borough and it was suggested another review of resourced provision take place.

Discussion took place around the suggestions for some of the funding used to provide Special School interventions to be redirected to much earlier intervention provision to prevent additional needs only being identified later in school life. It was acknowledged that getting a EHCP in Primary was a harder process due to the evidence needing to be collected over a period of time, it was also highlighted that often the environment in mainstream schools impacted on needs being identified and it was acknowledged that some Primary Schools had created effective nurture spaces.

7. Funding Briefing Note

Mr McDonald highlighted:

Information about a call for evidence in relation to SEN funding had been circulated

It was agreed: Mr McDonald would provide a draft response on behalf of Schools Forum to be approved at the next meeting.

Research was being conducted into the rising demand and associated costs for home-to-school transport. Feedback would be provided by the LA.

The F40 Briefing Note had been circulated prior to the meeting for information.

12 Heads had met with the Secretary of State for Education and raised a number of points.

A Governance Leadership programme had been provided until March 2020.

8. Any Other Business

Cllr Bullen expressed thanks to the Schools Forum for the work carried out this year for the children and young people in all schools on behalf of Wigan Council.

Cllr Bullen informed members the concerns raised regarding funding issues and staffing losses were being heard and congratulations were expressed to members for remaining positive.

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

Wednesday 26th June 2019 - at Bedford High School – please note the date and venue change

The Chair thanked Mrs Birchall for involvement in Schools Forum and wished her well for her upcoming retirement.

There being no further business to discuss the meeting closed at 2.45pm

