

Schools Forum Meeting
Thursday 14th March 2013 at 9.00a.m. at Progress House

Minutes

Members: , A Hardy (Chair), P Dahlstrom, S. Darbyshire, D Donaldson, G Hayes, L Fox, R Ward, J Shanahan, R Halford, S. Brierly, A Isherwood, R Lewis and A Wells.

LA Officers:

M Rotheram (Strategic Finance Manager)
A. Goldsmith (Director for Children and Families)
K. Nelson (Head of Service – Education)
D. Clarke (Strategic Manager – People’s Directorate)
L O’Halloran (Head of Customer Services – Resource Directorate)
C Myers (Group Finance Manager)
F. Gore (Clerk)

Observers: S Wilson (NASUWT)
T Warren (Liverpool Archdiocese)
Max Atkins (Wigan NUT)

1. Apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were received from P. McGhee, V Birchall and G Lloyd.

2. Welcome

The Chair extended a warm welcome to Anne Goldsmith who was attending her first meeting of the Forum following her appointment as Director for Children and Families and to Tim Warren who was attending his first meeting of the Forum in his capacity as Director of Education at the Liverpool Archdiocesan Authority.

3. Item for inclusion under AOB

- **Pupil Referral Units**

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 31st January 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2013 were **AGREED** as a true and correct record.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

Secure Cash Collection in Schools (Minute 3 refers):

Mr M. Rotheram reported that the tender documentation had been agreed and the Forum would be kept informed as the contract progressed.

Monies Retained for Growth (Minute 5 refers)

In response to a question from a Forum member Mr Rotheram reported that £100,000 had been retained by the Forum to fund growth elements and that the Forum had previously agreed to use this money to support schools with increasing rolls or for other appropriate purposes. The concern raised at the last Forum was that £100,000 would not be sufficient if the Authority was required to fund the set up costs of the Free School in Atherton. Whilst still awaiting final confirmation from the Department for Education regarding this it was not envisaged that this would be an issue for 2013/14.. .

Members discussed the principles to be used when allocating this funding, particularly in respect of basic need.

It was agreed: That a report be presented to the next meeting of the Forum recommending the principles and criteria to be used when determining how to allocated the funding for growth.

5. FSM Payments and Unified Benefits: Ms L. O'Halloran and Ms D. Clarke gave a report on the implications of the Governments proposal to establish a universal credit to replace a number of specific benefit payments, in particular its impact on children's entitlement for free school meals. Wigan was a Pathfinder Authority and was now working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to help the government prepare for the roll-out of the new benefit system across the country. As such Wigan was now well placed to understand the implications of the planned changes.

Those receiving Free School Meals (FSM) were currently unaffected by the planned changes and the Local Authority would continue to fund FSM. It was anticipated that Universal Credit would be the qualifying benefit for entitlement to FSM until April 2014.

The date for implementing the changes was presently April 2014 but that could change. The impact of the changes would be cost neutral. The DfE were currently reviewing entitlement criteria that would help ensure the most disadvantaged claimants were not adversely affected by the changes.

There was an opportunity for schools to assist parents to make an application for FSM on-line and to check entitlement to free school meals directly with the DWP. This was currently under development. Once more details were available, expressions of interest would be sought from schools about their willingness to participate. The Authority would continue with the administration.

Further details on the implementation of the planned changes were awaited and would be reported to the Forum.

It was agreed: (1) That the report be accepted and the Forum be kept informed of developments.

(2) That the Authority make appropriate arrangements to inform schools, Headteachers and school Governors of the opportunity to contact the DWP on line to notify them of children eligible for FSM.

(3) That the initiative and its impact be publicised within the Borough e.g. via Borough Life.

6. DfE Review of 2013–14 School Funding Arrangement.

Mr Rotheram submitted a report (circulated prior to the meeting) on a review of school funding arrangements for 2013-14. He outlined the purpose of the review which was to establish a funding system which :

- was up to date and reflected the current demographics of pupils across the country;
- Targeted additional money to those who needed extra support to achieve;
- Was consistent and pupil-led so that they would attract similar levels of funding wherever they went to school;
- Was transparent so that parents, Headteachers, governors and tax payers could see clearly how funding had been distributed and why;
- Gave pupils (supported by their parents and carers) genuine choice about which school they attended.

The changes would be implemented from April 2013 in a gradual transition to a national funding formula with the aim of placing greater focus on the needs of pupils and greater consistency across local areas. There had been a reduction in the number of formula factors that Local Authorities could use meaning that across the country schools would be funded using up to 12 clearly defined factors.

The report identified a number of areas for concern that had been expressed by Local Authorities and set out options for adjusting high needs funding from 2014-15.

Appendices to the report gave the response form and responses were required by 26 March 2013 which could lead to amendments in funding arrangements from 2014-15.

Members of the Forum raised a number of issues, including the time lag between now and 2015-16 regarding top-up funding for high needs pupils, the impact of Local Authorities adopting different rates for top-up funding and the impact of that on out of borough pupils and pupils placed with independent providers.

M Rotheram reported that from April 2013 there would be no recoupment between Authorities and that top up funding for high needs pupils would be passported directly to the provider from the relevant Local Authority commissioner. For 2013/14 the Local Authority has agreed to continue to support special schools in their dealings with commissioning authorities outside of Wigan in this transitional year..

It was agreed: (1) That Mr Rotheram be asked to respond to the consultation document based on the views expressed by members at the Forum and at the Funding Reform Sub-Group including comments received from schools to the changes in their schools' budget for 2013-14.

(2) Individual members of the Forum and other Headteachers be invited to respond to the consultation document.

(3) That the comparative data on the distribution of the Schools Block included in the consultation document be submitted to a future meeting of the Forum showing where Wigan was placed in the data.

(4) That members of the Forum be invited to contact the Chair or Vice-Chair if they had any specific issues they wished to raise on the consultation document.

7. Update on the Implementation of the National School Funding Proposals .

Mr Rotheram submitted a report (circulated prior to the meeting) updating members on the latest position with regard to the Dedicated Schools Grant which was now allocated via a Schools Block, High Needs Block and Early Years Block. The total budget allocated to schools via the Schools Block in 2013-14 would be £189,180,000.

Appendices to the report gave details of the budgets for all Primary and Secondary Schools, including details of the impact of the Minimum Fund Guarantee (MFG). Mr Rotheram confirmed that the Authority had met the requirements of the Regulations by making an initial determination of its school budgets by the deadline of 15 March 2013. Final budgets would be issued to schools on 15 March.

A member referred to a previous commitment of the High Needs Funding Sub Group that the top up funding for the two establishments with provision for Emotional, Behavioural and Social Difficulties would be based on planned places not actual places in 2013/14. This commitment was noted.

Mr Rotheram reported that information on Post 16 Funding for High Needs students would only be available the week beginning the 25th March and would be factored into the overall budget allocations at that time.

Members referred to the use of the MFG to protect school budgets and Mr Rotheram reported that because the MFG did not cover all elements of the school budget further work was needed to determine if any school budget had reduced by more than 1½% from their 2012-13 budget.

Mr Rotheram referred to the Early Years Block and Appendix 3 to the report gave draft budgets for Hindley Sure Start and Douglas Valley, including an MFG element.

It was agreed: (1) That the report be noted and it be agreed that the MFG be applied to the Early Years Block.

(2) That Mr Rotheram and his team be thanked for their efforts in producing the school budgets on time and with the level of information provided.

Any Other Business

8. Pupil Referral Units:

(Mr R. Wood and Ms A. Isherwood declared a pecuniary interest in this item and took no part in the discussion or voting thereon)

Ms K. Nelson reminded members of the proposals by the Authority for future Pupil Referral Unit provision which would create a single registered centre with one manager. The proposals would involve having the single centre on two sites thereby reducing the number of sites from six to two.

Ms Nelson now sought agreement to use any consequent savings and income arising from the reduction in sites to fund the condition elements required to make the two remaining buildings and sites fit for purpose. Initial estimates suggested that any saving or income accrued would be insufficient to meet the initial costs of the rationalisation onto two sites, although consideration would be given to a phased approach if this was seen to be financially beneficial. She also reminded members that the longer term aim was to establish the centre as an academy.

It was agreed: That approval be given to the use of any savings and income arising from the reduction in the number of PRU sites to fund the condition elements required to make the two planned PRU buildings and sites fit for purpose.

9. Date and time of future meetings.

Tuesday 7 May 2013 at 1.30 p.m. at Progress House

Thursday 4 July 2013 at 1.30 p.m. at Progress House.

Meeting closed at 9.55 a.m.