

SCHOOLS FORUM
MEETING HELD ON 6 JULY 2015

PRESENT:

Primary School Headteachers: Mrs S Randle and Mrs J Rea

Primary School Governors: Mrs S Symington

Secondary School Headteacher: Mr S White

Academy Representatives: Mrs M O'Connor and Ms B Atkinson

Special School Headteacher: Mrs E Horne

L A Representative: Councillor Mrs C Clark

14-19 Representative: Ms J Bailey

Officials: Mr D New – Senior Finance Manager
Ms D McConnell – Head of School and SEN
Mrs L Brown – Head of Education, Early Years and Complex Needs
Cllr A McCoy – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Mrs E Barrett – Secretary to the Schools Forum
Mrs C Azam – Business and Project Manager
Mr N Brama – LA Accountant

In the absence of the Chair, M O'Connor took the Chair.

1. **EVACUATION PROCEDURES**

Members noted the evacuations procedures to be used to exit the building in an emergency.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of C Hammill, J Humphreys, M Carlton, L Chilton, J Conway, B Jordan, J Thompson, C Walker and C Wilson.

3. **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Members were invited to declare any personal or business interests they may have in any item included on the agenda.

No interests were declared.

4. **MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING – 5 MAY 2015**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2015 be approved as a true record.

5. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

There were no matters arising.

6. **THE FREE NURSERY ENTITLEMENT UPDATE**

C Azam outlined the Free Nursery Entitlement Report which had been circulated prior to

the meeting. The following salient points were noted:

Progress

There had been 776 eligible children take up the two year offer which equated to 67.3%. This was a 13.8% increase on the previous year. The LA had data which highlighted where the rising three's were and an increase in marketing materials had all contributed to the increased take up.

The DWP provided an updated list of eligible children which is passed to Children's Centre's and Families Information Service (FIS). An incentive of a £20 voucher had been implemented to encourage take up, this would run until the Autumn term.

Sufficiency

There were issues with the location of the available places offered for the two year olds, particularly with no provision available in the Hardwick area. It was anticipated that there would be 800 children accessing provision by the summer term.

Priorities

These included increasing the number of two year's old taking up the offer and working closely with other agencies to encourage take up.

New Initiative – Increase in free childcare from 15 to 30 hours for eligible 3 and 4 year olds

This would take effect September 2017 with pilot areas commencing September 2016. It was acknowledged this would be a huge pressure on School nurseries with capacity an issue. It was hoped that capital funding would be available to support the initiative.

A consultation had been launched to review the funding levels which the LA were preparing a response. Schools Forum were asked if they would like to prepare their own response to the consultation or add comments to the LA response. *Members questioned the rationale behind the changes.* This was for working parents to provide free childcare in line with Europe, parents would need to work 8 hours to qualify. A McCoy outlined that the Chancellor would be announcing his budget this week and there would be changes that affect working families. *Members queried the School holidays versus term time provision.* Currently the 15 hours provision could be spread across private providers and this would be the case with the increased 30 hours. School nurseries currently offer term time provision only and this would be the individual Schools choice to change this to whole time.

RESOLVED that:

- a) Planning and Partnership send the formal consultation response;
- b) any members comments be sent to C Azam as soon as possible as the closing date for consultation was 10 August 2015.

Members

C Azam withdrew from the meeting.

7. HIGH NEEDS REVIEW SCOPING PAPER

D New outlined the High Needs Funding report circulated prior to the meeting. It was highlighted that a review of funding was needed partly as it had been two years since last reviewed and also in light of the SEN reforms that had been implemented.

There were huge pressures on the High Needs funding block budget and it was not sustainable moving forwards with the current arrangements. Presently the funding was reactive to the numbers of planned places needed with bids to the DfE only partly successful. Funding was apportioned equally regardless of the relevant setting which also raised the question of funding to Special Schools.

Proposed scope of review

- The SEN reforms and funding now apply to the 0-25 age range;
- Banding criteria and outcomes achieved;
- Application process for High Needs funding;
- Planned places.

Any review needs to be undertaken timely as changes would be implemented in the 2016 – 2017 budget. There would also need to be consultation with the various settings and therefore changes may not be implemented until the 2017 – 2018 budget.

L Brown outlined that the High Needs Block fund would need to be reviewed in light of how the total was shared across the settings and that the current system was too cumbersome.

E Horne confirmed that the DfE were also undertaking a review around Special Schools base funding and how this would impact on any decisions made within Schools Forum. It was noted that these changes would be announced in the Autumn term for implementation April 2016 and therefore members needed to be mindful of this during their review.

Members asked if there had been any impact on the personal budget changes within the SEN reforms. It seemed very few had been taken up although this was still a new initiative and may increase over time.

RESOLVED that a working party be set up to review High Needs Funding and comprise of J Harvey, L Brown, E Horne, S Symington, M O'Connor and D New.

8. SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA 2015-2016 – COMPARISON TO STATISTICAL NEIGHBOURS

N Bamma outlined the previously circulated paper which had resulted as a query raised at Schools Forum 6 May 2015. The following areas were highlighted:

- The paper looked at the deprivation element of Schools block funding formulae in comparison to its statistical neighbours;
- The Schools block element of the DSG varied across authorities with Stockton in the middle of its statistical neighbours;
- Deprivation factors can use different indicators and it is therefore difficult to compare like with like;
- Stockton were at the top of the neighbours for percentage of funding allocated through the deprivation element;
- Stockton were in the middle of their neighbours for the percentage gap of children achieving Level 4 or above in Reading, Writing and Maths between disadvantaged and non disadvantaged children. This was a 19% gap which was an improvement on the previous year at 23%;
- At Key Stage 4, 5 A*-C GCSE, there was a 34.9% gap noted between disadvantaged and non disadvantaged pupils.

RESOLVED that members note the statistical report.

It was questioned why more deprivation funding was allocated to Primaries than Secondary Schools. It was highlighted that the current formulae agreed in 2013 was to ensure stability therefore some funding was historic. Schools also received Pupil Premium funding relevant to eligible pupils which equated to an additional £10 million.

In light of the current Secondary Schools performances should the deprivation allocation be reviewed by sector. It was discussed that through the transition guarantee more work would be done with Key Stage 3 to accelerate progress. Members

acknowledged the great work that the Primary Schools were doing and it was important to keep this momentum moving forward. It was also noted that any decisions should be made using current data.

Thanks were extended to N Bamma for creating the report.

9. GROWTH FUND - UPDATE

D New outlined his previously circulated report on the Growth Fund. There had been issues highlighted earlier to Schools Forum with regards to the Primary Admissions round for 2015.

There had been a shortfall of 120 Primary places in Thornaby and Central, North Stockton. This had now been resolved and thanks were extended to all the Schools involved who had agreed to take additional pupils from September 2015 into Reception. There had been one change since the previous update with Hardwick Academy taking an additional 20 pupils and Harrow Gate taking an additional 10 pupils.

Funding was needed by these Schools to support Teaching Staff and teaching space on an individual basis but agreement was also needed with regards to funding those additional children through the School.

Future Years

Two scenarios were presented to the Forum:

- Use the AWPU with no additional funding outside the formula, although Schools were not agreeable to this as they would be left with a shortfall in future years;
- Provide funding based on the difference between the AWPU and the actual additional staffing costs.

D New proposed that the funding should be brought into line with the Academy model and that Schools apply for funding for the following academic year. Each School would be required to put their individual case forward to apply for the additional funding yearly as situations could change.

The anticipated cost would be around £200,000 on an annual basis. If this growth was identified as a trend rather than a blip then a further review would be needed. It was unclear at the present time whether this was a trend or blip. It appeared that the numbers of applicants was correctly identified however the issue was the location of the preference Schools. Data would be interrogated earlier in the application process to ensure any issues are identified.

Members discussed clawing back any reserves in Schools budgets. It was noted that once funds had been delegated they could not legally be clawed back without following the licensed surplus process which only applied to maintained schools.

RESOLVED that Schools Forum agree to proposal b and that Schools should apply on an annual basis for additional funding with regards to the growth fund.

10. SCHOOLS BUDGET OUTTURN

D New referred to the previously circulated Schools Budget and Balances 2014 – 2015 paper. The following was highlighted:

School Budget

Overall there was a £1.208 million underspend noted, this variance on the planned spending was mainly due to the low take up of the two year old funded places. In addition there was a £921,000 surplus carry forward from the 2013 – 2014 budget giving a total of £2.129 million carry forward to 2015 – 2016.

Of the carry forward, £811,000 was earmarked in 2015/16 for the High Needs Block, £353,000 for Early Years, £256,000 for Primary Growth Fund with the remaining £709,000 uncommitted until the impact of the spending review was known.

Balances

School balances had reduced by £0.8 million mainly due to Academy conversions, this equated to £5.4 million which was around 6% of the annual individual Schools budget. This was similar to the figure noted for 2013 – 2014. Thresholds for Primary Schools was 8% and 5% for Secondary Schools.

There were two Secondary, and fourteen Primary Schools who had over the threshold budget reserves. This was mainly due to uncertainty around the Government elections plus prudent financial management particularly in light of increased employer contributions to National Insurance and Superannuation. All the Schools had applied for a surplus balance license and all had been approved by the LA.

There were no Schools with a deficit budget.

D New

It was questioned if the proposed budget cuts had been accounted for. D New confirmed that a paper could be circulated outlining the impact of funding cuts.

RESOLVED that members note the Schools Budget and Balances report.

11. WORK PROGRAMME AND FUTURE MEETING DATES

Members agreed to the circulated work programme and future meeting dates.

12. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

B Atkinson withdrew from the meeting.

12.1 Delegated budgets

L Brown outlined that a sub group had met to discuss spending on behavior and support services in the LA. Impact of spending would be monitored with scrutiny over the de delegated funds. This working party comprised C Walker, S White, D McConnell, M Carlton, J Conway, S Randle and J Rea.

13. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting would be held at 1:30pm on Tuesday 20 October 2015 at The Education Centre in Stockton Sixth Form College with apologies submitted from Cllr A McCoy.