

SCHOOLS' FORUM
MEETING HELD ON 27th NOVEMBER 2018

PRESENT

Primary Maintained School Headteachers: Mrs S Richardson and Mr E Squire

Primary Academy Headteachers: Mr E Huntington and Mrs J Armstrong

Primary Governors: Mrs M Dowson and Mr C Wilson

Secondary Maintained School Headteacher: Mr C Walker

Secondary Academy Headteachers: Mrs L Spellman and Mr S White

Secondary Governor: Mr J Thompson

Special School Representative: Mr M Little – substitute for Mrs C Thomas

14 – 19 Representative: Mr P Cook

LA Representative: Councillor Mrs C Clark

Trade Union Representative: Mr L Russell - Chair

OFFICIALS: Mr D New – Senior Finance Manager
 Mr G Waller – Accountant
 Mr M Gray – Director of Children's Services
 Mrs N Fletcher – Secretary to the Forum

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mrs A McCoy (SBC Member for Children and Young People) - Observer

1. **EVACUATION PROCEDURES**

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

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

RESOLVED that the apologies for absence submitted on behalf of Mr A Ramsey, Mr G Rickard, Ms E Carr and Mr A Ruffell.

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 – 23rd OCTOBER 2018**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd October 2018, be approved.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

5.1 High Needs – Excluded Pupils

M Dowson confirmed that since the last meeting information as to the gender of excluded pupils had been provided, following this she had contacted M Gray to seek further information as to the number of SEND or Pupil Premium pupils permanently excluded and this analysis was currently being undertaken.

5.2 School Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool

Members were informed that the Secretary had contacted E Nunn – DfE Funding Policy Unit to ascertain whether they would provide the demonstration on the Self-Assessment Tool to governors, A response was awaited.

6. SCHOOLS' FORUM GOOD PRACTICE SELF-ASSESSMENT

D New referred to the circulated paper Schools' Forum Good Practice Self-Assessment, he reminded members that at the previous meeting, it had been agreed that in the first instance officers would complete the self-assessment and report their findings at the next meeting.

D New gave a precis of the self-assessment document highlighting the following questions;

- Q 6: *Are papers published as a single document, so that users can download easily?* No – attachments easy to download and best sent separately.
- Q8: *Are draft minutes published a reasonable time (ie.. Within 2-3 weeks) after the meeting rather than waiting to the following meeting?* Minutes are available one week before the subsequent meeting.
- Q10: *Is the constitution clear and appropriate?* The Schools' Forum Operating Procedures were last updates in September 2013, so would benefit from review.
- Q11: *Is there an induction pack or training programme available for new members?* An Induction Pack was in place but required updating, in the past training has been delivered.
- Q17: *Do members actively canvass views and objectively represent their whole peer group at the forum and provide feedback after meetings?*

Comments were sought from members on the responses to the self-assessment questions, with particular reference to Q17.

M Dowson stated that as a new member she would welcome training.

S Robinson highlighted that related to Q4, a number of members had problems accessing from Egenda on SBC Website, with the website link being blocked via the servers they use, although members did receive papers as the Secretary also e-mailed the papers to members.

E Huntington considered that issue was with those schools whose systems were not organised by ONE IT.

M Little questioned whether the minutes could be circulated to members shortly after the meeting rather than with the papers for the next meeting.

RESOLVED Members noted the Self-Assessment responses and that all areas where there was deemed to be a weakness would be reviewed by the Chair of Schools'

Forum, the Senior Finance Officer and Secretary to the Forum with the intention of making the necessary improvements.

Action
L Russell /
D New /
Secretary

7. DELEGATION / DE-DELEGATION 2019/20

D New referred to the circulated paper, he reminded members that funding for de-delegated services must be allocated through the formula but could be passed back, or de-delegated for maintained primary and secondary schools with Schools Forum approval. The Local Authority was proposing the option of de-delegation for the following areas in 2019/20;

- Contingencies
- Contingencies – Support to Schools Partnership Fund
- Staff costs supply cover – Union facilities time
- Behaviour and Support Services
- Free school Meals eligibility

S Richardson reported that she had consulted with her colleague Headteachers of the maintained schools within the LA (1 secondary and 27 primary schools) and had received 50% responses. Members were informed that the consultation had triggered numerous questions and during the consultation period she had contacted D New to ascertain further information in order to respond to the colleagues' questions. She had established that;

- *Contingencies*: none of this funding had been spent last year;
- *Contingencies – Support to Schools Partnership Fund*: 7 schools had accessed this funding last year and it was fully spent.
- *Staff costs supply cover – Trade Union facilities time*: It had been questioned as to how the fund was allocated, was the allocation based on proportionality of trade union membership or did representative have to submit invoices. It was anticipated that the fund would be fully spent. It was confirmed that the fund was allocated based on proportionality of membership.
- *Behaviour and Support Services*: this area had caused the most anxiety for schools, the funding does not fund a specific post at present, although there were plans to fund a specific post for maintained schools to access in the future. S Richardson reported that there had been a very mixed response from her primary colleagues, who would be monitoring this very closely over the next year. ***C Wilson questioned what the tipping point would be for the LA not to offer these services with more and more schools converting to academy status, D New explained that the LA was constantly monitoring the situation to ensure viability. L Russell stated that academies also had the option of buying in.***

E Squires considered that there was an issue around the quality of Behaviour Services, but if schools don't buy in then they cannot influence the quality of service.

S Richardson informed members that next year primary colleagues had requested that they were provided with detailed information as to what the funding had been spent on, they wanted to ensure that any funding not spent was re-allocated to schools.

L Spellman questioned the reporting mechanism for the use of trade union facilitation funding, there needed to be transparency as to how the money was spent.

L Russell explained that for those academies that did not buy into the trade union facilitation, service level agreements were in place at a cost of £200 per day, the cost of supply cover.

S White reported that via JCC work was being undertaken to identify costings.

E Squires considered that consultation with school needed to be undertaken earlier, and prior to the consultation the LA should ascertain what information schools required in order for them to make informed decisions.

Following discussion the eligible members representing maintained schools voted separately according to their sector on the proposals set out in the report to de-delegate services

RESOLVED to approve all the de-delegation options as set out in the report for both the secondary and primary sectors.

8. TRANSFER OF RESOURCES FROM THE SCHOOLS BLOCK TO THE HIGH NEEDS BLOCK IN 2019/20

D New referred members to the circulated paper Transfer from Schools Block to High Needs and the following points were highlighted;

Introduction

At the previous meeting (23rd October 2018) members were presented with a report which set out the position on High Needs and the intention to seek schools views on the transfer of funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. The current paper set out the results of the recent local consultation, which asked schools for their views on transferring £1.4m which would require a Disapplication Request to the Secretary of State for approval, as this was more than the 0.5% threshold that the Schools Forum could approve.

Background

In 2017/18 Stockton experienced an in year over spend of £2.5m on High Needs and at the previous meeting members noted a projected £2.327m overspend at the end of 2018/19 (including the net £1.413m overspend b/fwd on DSG from 2017/18). The view of the LA was that there is insufficient High Needs funding as it had not kept pace with significant cost pressures and the LA was lobbying both at regional and national levels for an increase in funding, however the LA must take the necessary action to live within the funding envelope available.

M Gray explained that out of 12 LAs within the North East and Cumbria, it was believed that 11 LA's were seeking transfers of funding to High Needs.

High Needs

D New explained that to address the situation a number of measures were being taken by the LA (outlined in paragraph 8). In 2018/19 following the approval of Schools Forum 0.5% (£0.6m) of Schools Block funding was transferred into High Needs, this proved to be insufficient to counter the significant pressures being experienced, the key drivers including;

- EHCP's / Statements
- Permanent Exclusions
- Pre-16 base places in special academies and mainstream units
- Pre-16 top ups particularly from mainstream
- Out of area placements

C Walker highlighted that in 2017/18 permanent exclusions had increased to 43 and already to date this year there had been 19 permanent exclusions, therefore the situation was not slowing down.

D New referred to the breakdown of the specific pressures in the table in para 11 that

had led to the requirement to consider a transfer. Members were asked to note that the provision of top up funding to mainstream schools and academies had increased by over £0.9m and also the increased cost of funding provision for 19 to 25 year olds, which was relatively new financial commitment (£308k in 2017/18).

D New explained that the LA was clear that a range of plans needed to be in place to address both the short and medium term funding gaps, together with a long term solution requiring a full partnership approach with the whole school family. In March 2018 the LA ran an event for all relevant parties seeking ideas to help develop a more affordable funding solution. Following this and subsequent discussions at the Stockton Strategic Education Boards and School's Forum the LA developed and was in the process of implementing a High Needs Action Plan. The transfer of £1.4m would in effect repay the deficit b/fwd at the commencement of the current financial year.

Based on current information the LA will have an accumulated deficit of £2.3m on high Needs by 31st March 2019, with a provisional projected shortfall in 2019/20 of a further £1.7m. The transfer of 1.1% would reduce the £4.0m by £1.4m leaving an accumulated deficit of £2.6m as the transfer would be applicable for 2019/20 only. The position would be kept under review and it maybe that the LA would seek School's Forum approval for subsequent year transfers.

Members were informed of collaborative work being undertaken with neighbouring LAs and specialist providers and that the LA and Health and Wellbeing Board had recently agreed a Special Education Needs and Disability Joint Strategy. The SEND Joint Commissioning Group had developed a three year shared strategy which;

- Identified a set of key commitments and priorities that would underpin all joint planning and commissioning decisions around SEND
- Forms the basis for a review of SEND service provisions to be taken forward by the SEND Development Joint Commissioning Subgroup. This also provided a framework for effective joint planning, understanding and review of SEND services in the borough.

Reference was made to contributions for Health and Social care for specialist provision. D New drew members' attention to Appendix 3 showing the potential impact on individual schools Budgets, which were for illustrative purposes only and based on the latest EFSA model for 2018/19.

Outcome of Local Consultation

D New reported that since the last meeting a consultation exercise had been undertaken with schools / academies to transfer £1.4m from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, Members were informed that 16 responses had been received, which equated to a 21% rate of response. The consultation document and responses received together with the LA's replies to the responses were included in appendices 1 and 2 of the paper. Of the 16 responses received 10 (63%) agreed to the proposal, 6 (37%) did not and 62 schools had not respond to the consultation.

D New concluded his presentation by affirming that School's Forum was being asked to support the request to transfer £1.4m (1.1%) of the Schools Block to the High Needs Block and that a disapplication request be submitted to the Secretary of State to this effect. In the event of the disapplication request being unsuccessful, School's Forum to agree a transfer of 0.5% funding from Schools Block to the High Needs Block.

Discussion

M Gray clarified that insufficient High Needs funding was both a regional and national issue. The LA was facing increasing demands for High Needs funding and he reminded

members that the top up funding goes back into school budgets

S White outlined that schools were also facing budget issues and were being asked to make efficiency savings as was the LA. Schools were having to consider reducing staffing and curriculum delivery, he considered that the issue was larger than just High Needs it was a much wider educational issue. He questioned how to future proof schools, what do Health fund as more and more responsibility and costs seemed to be placed on schools with no additional funding.

E Squires questioned as this was a national issue and a large number of School's Forums were being asked to agree transfer of funding, how could the under-funding of schools be raised with the Secretary of State. The change to the Universal Credit system was also having a major negative impact on Pupil Premium funding received for disadvantaged pupils.

E Huntington considered that School's Forum did not have control over the national issue, but would be judged on how it treated the most vulnerable children within the borough.

J Armstrong reported that at a recent Schools North East meeting a number of LAs were not agreeing to transfer funding as they considered that it could be interrupted that LA's had sufficient funding within their Schools Block to transfer funding out, rather than that additional High Needs funding was required from central government.

S White reported that the issues of insufficient funding had been raised with a local MP by a number of schools who had agreed to take the matter forward and then report back.

M Gray agreed that there was a need to make strenuous representation at both regional and national levels. He considered that with the introduction of the national funding formula the situation was not going to improve.

C Wilson questioned what the implications would be if School's Forum did not agree to the 1.1% transfer. M Gray stated that the High Needs deficit would continue to increase.

J Armstrong reported that one North East LA was considering different methods of funding their High Needs deficit rather than from the Schools Block.

S White suggested that when moving forward consideration was required as to what best practice was, looking at key aspects i.e. alternative provision, SEN protocols etc.

P Cook suggested that the LA need to look at the symptoms of the issue, information was available to predict demand and funding requirements could be estimated.

L Spellman highlighted that in order for decisions to be made the correct people had to be around the table, those who had the decision making authority from both the LA, schools and academies.

S White suggested that the totality of the situation had to be looked at as a matter of urgency, looking at a slimmed down approach.

S Richardson considered the low level of response to the consultation was shocking, she suggested that a longer period of consultation would have been better and provided more opportunity for discussion between Headteachers and Chairs of

Governors.

D New explained that the minutes of the meeting, the Schools Forum Report and local consultation with schools would form part of the disapplication request to the Secretary of State.

At the conclusion of the discussions members agreed to vote on the two proposals;

Following a vote (11 for, 2 against, 0 abstentions)

RESOLVED that in recognition of the significant pressure on the High Needs budget, the Schools' Forum support the request for a transfer of £1.4m (1.1%) of the Schools Block to the High Needs Budget and that a disapplication request would be submitted to the Secretary of State to that effect

Following a vote (13 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions)

RESOLVED that in the event of the disapplication request to the Secretary of State being unsuccessful, Schools' Forum agree a transfer of 0.5% funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Budget.

9. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

9.1 Pupil Attendance Issues

E Huntington drew members' attention to a recent issue at a local primary school regarding parents taking their children out of school for holidays during term time. He expressed concern that there was no guidance provided for Headteachers with regard to exceptional circumstances and when applications could be approved.

A McCoy informed members that she had a planned meeting with two officers to discuss attendance matters and would raise the concern at the meeting.

S Richardson reported that a neighbouring LA had set specific criteria, therefore the matters was taken out of Headteachers' hands.

10. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting be held at 1:30 pm on 22nd January 2019.

