

SCHOOLS FORUM
MEETING HELD ON 25th JUNE 2019

PRESENT

Primary Maintained School Headteachers: Mr A Ruffell and Mrs C Taylor

Primary Academy Headteacher: Mr E Huntington

Primary Governors: Mrs M Dowson and Mr C Wilson

Secondary Maintained School Headteacher: Mr R Henderson

Secondary Academy Headteacher: Mr A Ramsey

Special School Representative: Mrs C Thomas

Diocesan Representative: Mr K Duffy

14 – 19 Representative: Mr P Cook

Trade Union Representative: Mr L Russell - Chair

OFFICIALS: Mr D New – Senior Finance Manager
Mrs J Mills – SEN & Engagement Service Manager
Mrs N Fletcher – Secretary to the Forum

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor C Clarke – Observer
Mrs S Hewitson – S&GSS, Observer
Mrs A Allen – Nicholas Postgate Catholic Multi Academy Trust,
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 Mrs J Armstrong, Ms E Carr, Mrs C Prendagast, Mr G Rickard, Mrs L Spellman, Mr E Squire, Mr J Thompson, Mr S White and Mr M Gray.

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 – 5th February 2019**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5th February 2019, be approved.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

5.1 Schools Budget 2019/20

D New reported that the Secretary of State had approved the disapplication request to transfer £1.4m (1.1%) from Schools Block to High Needs Block, therefore the budget had been set on this basis (scenario one).

6. SCHOOL BUDGET OUTTURN 2018/19

The circulated report informed members of the outturn position of the schools budget and provided an overview of the maintained school balances for the 2018/19 financial year. D New reported that there was an overall deficit of £2.577m, (which included a brought forward overspend in the high needs budget of £1.413m from 2017/18). This was an increase of £0.172m on the projected deficit of £2.405m reported on 5th February 2019. The report provided members with reasons for the significant variances between planned and actual spending for the financial year, with the in-year net overspend being £1.163m, which was made up of £1.625m on high needs offset by £0.46m underspend on other areas.

Overall maintained school balances stood at £3.703m (6.5%), which was a decrease of £0.306m between 2017/18 and 2018/19, mainly due to academy conversions.

Members RESOLVED to note the position for 2018/19 and agreed to use the underspends in the other blocks against the overspend in the High Needs Block.

7. DFE AND OTHER UPDATES

The circulated report informed members about the funding and other related updates made since the last meeting. D New provided members with a precis of the report highlighting;

Teachers' Pension Grant

From September 2019 the employer's contribution rate would be increasing from 16.48% to 23.6% and the grant was to fund the increase in the employer's contribution for the period September 2019 to March 2020 for maintained schools and to August 2020 for academies. Funding beyond these dates would be subject to a wider spending review. A Supplementary fund had also been established for schools to apply to if they experienced a shortfall of more than 0.05% in their additional grant funding compared to their actual costs of the increase.

In response to a question D New confirmed that it would be for schools identify any spending gap and make an application for supplementary funding.

P Cook reported that Stockton Riverside College (SRC) was anticipating an increase of between 2 – 5% following Local Government Pension changes, he questioned whether this increase would impact on schools.

Call For Evidence – Funding for SEND and those who need AP

The DfE was looking at how much overall funding would be needed in future years and the Call for Evidence was an invitation to consider other aspects of the funding arrangements and how resources could be better used.

D New reported that the LA would be submitting a response to the consultation by the deadline of 31st July 2019. He explained that schools could make responses in their own right. The Council for Disabled Children had organised a small number of

workshops across the country to discuss themes of the call for evidence in greater detail

Designated Education Officer Post (DEO)

The DEO post within the Children's Hub supported schools in their safeguarding duties. For 2019/20 the LA would share the costs of the DEO post (£32k) with Hartlepool Borough Council.

Members RESOLVED to note the report.

8. HIGH NEEDS RECOVERY PLAN

D New referred members to the circulated report highlighting the Government requirement (introduced in February 2019) for LAs with more than a 1% deficit on their overall Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to submit a three year recovery plan by the end of June of the following year. For Stockton the cumulative deficit was £2.577m which equated to 1.6% of the gross DSG. The DfE would then review the recovery plans on a case by case basis with the intention of providing each LA with feedback by the end of September.

Members were informed that there had been growing high needs pressures since the SEND reforms of 2014 and the main drivers of the financial pressures in Stockton were;

- The number of EHCPs had increased by 56% since 2014/15;
- Permanent exclusion had increased by 229% since 2014/15;
- Non statutory SEN – new approved applications had increased by 19% in the last financial year alone.

There had only been small increases in the amount of DSG funds allocated by Government to High Needs Block, therefore funding had not kept pace with the significant cost pressures and increased demand. The view of the LA is that there is insufficient high needs funding provided by central government. Reference was also made to the funding gap being quoted nationally by the LGA.

Deficit Recovery Plan Proposals

The work on high needs had been incorporated in the transformation programme of reviews across Children's Services, focusing on system wide changes. D New gave a precis of the transformation review under the following headings;

- Earlier identification to reduce requests for high needs funding;
- Inclusive schools;
- Commissioning;
- Placements;
- Alternative Provision.

Members were advised the extent of the current deficit made it difficult recovering this from on-going spend without adversely impacting on the needs of children and young people. Appendix 1 of the report set out the proposed budget plan for the next three years, with potential savings from;

- Reviewing the contract arrangements for Hearing and Vision Impairment Services;
- Occupational Therapy Services – reduction in the use of privately commissioned services;
- EMS mappings exercise;
- Mapping exercise of future needs across the next three years for Post 16 pathways;
- Reduce number of independent special school placements ;

- Stem the growth in the use of out of area academies/schools;
- Clearly identify through EHCPs (new and reviews) work with partners involved with children and young people;
- The Tees Valley Free School would reduce the number of children requiring independent special school provision.

D New explained that the funding projection assumed that the transfer of £1.4m from the Schools Block to High Needs Block would continue in 2020/21 only. Currently it was assumed that would be the last year LAs would determine allocations to schools before the new national funding formula was introduced.

The DfE in recognition of the high needs pressures had announced additional funding for 2018/19 and 2019/20 which equated to £453,500 each year for Stockton and it was assumed that the DfE would continue with this funding year on year thereafter.

D New reported that the Budget Plan for the next three years cumulative deficit of £2.6m in 2018/19 moving to £3.3m by 2021/22, in the same time span the in-year deficit reduced from £1.15m to £0.57m.

Members noted the risks associated with delivery of the plan;

- Spending growth was greater than anticipated;
- Specific issues around achieving potential savings;
- Planned funding not materialised;
- Reduction in existing levels of high needs involved significant challenges and also depended on the shared commitment of all stakeholders.

During discussion of the report the following comments were made and questions asked.

How would schools be made to reduce exclusions?

J Mills explained that the Timpson Review of School Exclusion recommended that schools would be made more accountable (financially and for pupil outcomes) for the pupils they had excluded.

How was implementation of the plan to be monitored?

Regular updates would be presented to Schools Forum on the implementation of the plan, which was being led by J Mills.

J Mills responded to a question regarding the management of parental expectations, as EHCPs were perceived to be a gate way to additional funding.

Was EMS providing a better quality of service when compared to ARPs as some children cannot cope in being educated in ordinary classrooms?

There are hidden costs to schools in the preparation of applications for EHCPs, which were not taken into account.

Schools with EMS only had limited capacity, schools were funding additional therapy pupils required, schools were under increasing pressures, the plan did not provide the additional funding required, currently there was a national funding crisis which was not being addressed.

Members RESOLVED to support the High Needs Deficit Recovery Plan.

9. FUTURE MEETING DATES AND PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Members were asked to consider two date changes to those published in the circulated calendar, the amendments being:

- Meeting of 1st October 2019 be re-scheduled to 8th October 2019
- Meeting of 25th June 2020 be re-scheduled to 23rd June 2020.

Members RESOLVED to approve the amendments outlined above.

10. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no matters raised.

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