

SCHOOLS FORUM
MEETING HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2019

PRESENT

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

Primary Governors: Mrs M Dowson and Mr G Rickard

Secondary Maintained School Headteacher: Mr R Henderson

Secondary School Headteacher Representative: Mr S White

Secondary Academy Headteacher Representative: Mrs L Spellman

Special School Representative: Mrs C Thomas

14 – 19 Representative: Mr P Cook

Local Authority Representative: Councillor C Clarke

Trade Union Representative: Mr L Russell (Chair)

Observer: Councillor L Evans

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs E Higgins (Substitute for Diocesan Representative, Mr K Duffy)

OFFICIALS: Mr D New – Senior Finance Manager
Mr M Gray – Director of Children Services
Mr G Waller – Senior Accountant
Mrs S Hewitson – Secretary to the Forum

1. **EVACUATION PROCEDURES**

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

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Mr E Squire had submitted his resignation as Primary School Headteacher Representative. The Clerk had contacted the Chair of the Primary Headteacher group to seek nominations.

Mr J Thompson's term of office had ended as Secondary School Governor therefore the Clerk had emailed out to all Secondary Schools to seek nominations.

RESOLVED that the apologies for absence submitted on behalf of Mrs J Armstrong, Ms E Carr, Mr K Duffy, Mr E Huntington and Mr C Wilson be received with consent.

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 – 8th October 2019

Amendment:

Page 4, Other Updates, paragraph 2 -

... she voiced concerns around the funding strains on special schools and if they would be allocated any funding. *Mr D New confirmed that there would be no additional funding allocated to special schools.*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8th October 2019 be approved, *once amended.*

Clerk

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

6. SCHOOLS FORUM – OPERATIONAL AND GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE AND POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A copy of the Schools Forum Operational and Good Practice Guide, Schools Forum Powers and Responsibilities and Schools Forum Structure was distributed to members in advance of the meeting following a request at the previous meeting.

The Clerk informed members that A Ludlam from the Education Skills Funding Agency had requested minutes be published on Egenda in advance of the next meeting. D New explained it was seen as good practice from the DfE although it was not a statutory requirement.

Members RESOLVED that draft minutes would be published on Egenda for public viewing in advance of the next meeting.

7. DELEGATION / DE-DELEGATION 2020/21

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 2020/21:

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

A Ruffell, on behalf of the Primary Maintained Schools confirmed that the Heads were in favour to de-delegate the services set out above except the Free School Meals eligibility delegation. This was on the basis that some of them already buy into a checker available via software contracts which seemed a better and more efficient arrangement for schools. D New agreed to look into the position and provide information to help primary maintained schools understand the potential implications of loss of the central eligibility checking service. Primary Heads also requested that they were provided with detailed information as to what the funding had been spent

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on as they wanted to ensure that any funding not spent was re-allocated to schools on the same basis that it was paid.

Secondary representatives did not have the same views as Primary as they didn't find FSM an onerous task. Primary Heads voiced concerns around the quality of the service with the LA in Customer Services as this didn't seem as rigorous as the SLA's academies were buying into.

Members discussed any outstanding ring-fenced funding be allocated to all schools equally.

RESOLVED to:

- a) approve all the de-delegation options as set out in the report for the secondary sector
- b) approve all de-delegation options as set out in the report for the primary sector except Free School Meals eligibility which would be deferred to the next meeting.

Agenda

8. HIGH NEEDS UPDATE (PRESENTATION)

M Gray referred members to the circulated SEND and HNB presentation where he guided members through the following slides:

- Contents
- Purpose
- Scale of the Issue
- How the SEND system works
- What is causing budget pressure
- What is causing budget pressure in Stockton
- What does it mean for us
- What are we doing about it
- Earlier identification and response
- Schools and SEN support
- Joint commissioning
- What a new SALT approach might look like
- Changing provision
- Tackling exclusion, alternative provision
- Effectiveness and efficiency
- Delivery and timescales

The following salient points were highlighted to members:

- The system covered children and young people from birth to the age of 25 and had a focus on preparing children and young people for adulthood.
- ***In response to a member's question***, Mr M Gray confirmed there was 3.2% of EHCP's and 12% SEN support in Stockton.
- The main causes of the budget pressures was the increasing number of EHCP's, additional responsibilities for 19-25 year olds with no new funding, increased number and cost of top ups, more use of out of area specialist placements and increasing exclusions mainly in academies.
- The options in order to mitigate budget pressures was to transfer funding, reduce spending, and receive new funding and reference was made to the recovery plan sent to the DfE.
- M Gray informed members that the main focus for Stockton was earlier

identification of children's requirements, Schools and SEN support, joint commissioning, provision, alternative provision and exclusion and efficiency. Earlier identification and response of early years, identification and skills, support and assessment and family support.

- There wasn't enough alternative provision in Stockton therefore additional provision was required.

M Gray welcomed any questions from members.

Members discussed the suggestions made by Mr M Gray to mitigate the £6m overspend and proposed that joint commissioning consist of a partnership with the NHS, schools and the LA.

S Richardson declared she was a panel member for Enhanced Mainstream School (EMS).

S Richardson highlighted the difference in the funding of EMS and mainstream provision.

The EMS commissioned places were funded per place and not on actual uptake this was significantly different from mainstream and special schools. She considered that this was an expensive model which used too much funding, which could be better spent elsewhere.

L Spellman advised the EMS provision at Conyers was nearly full of the 10 places available in school 8 of these were taken by Year 7 pupils. There was a problem with the allocation of resources, pressures of the curriculum and the provision of places.

Mr M Gray highlighted the importance of high needs provision and that there needed to be a Stockton wide solution to the issues raised. He suggested that a piece of work was required to investigate this.

Mr A Ruffell suggested that identification of special needs requirements should be made prior to admission to school. M Gray explained that health professionals already made recommendations as to which schools children with special needs should attend.

S White explained that following parents being successful with their admissions appeal for an EMS place, appeals for mainstream places were now using the over establishment of the EMS provision as grounds for their appeal, stating that if the EMS provision was over PAN the Mainstream provision could also be over PAN. S Richardson explained that there was a restorative approach in place to ensure a smooth transition from primary to secondary.

P Cook raised concerns again regarding the current and projected deficit and the possibility that the deficit may increase further if the strategy was unsuccessful.

L Spellman attended a presentation regarding joint commissioning proposals which she was unsure how it would be beneficial to schools. She proposed that the LA enquire about working in partnership with the NHS.

Cllr. L Evans introduced herself to members and explained she had been appointed in May 2019 and visited the SEND department recently. She highlighted the complexity of the provision and that funding wasn't just a problem in Stockton but nationally.

Members noted the High Needs presentation.

9. SCHOOLS FUNDING CONSULTATION 2020/21

The Schools Funding Consultation paper for 2020/21 had been previously circulated to all members. Following reports to Schools Forum on 8th October 2019, a consultation exercise was undertaken on proposals for next year's funding arrangements. The council consulted on preferences for the school funding formula and a 0.5% (£0.66m) transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. Information was provided to schools on the background to the proposal as part of the consultation document. The full consultation document was enclosed as an appendix to the report.

Of the 78 schools consulted with, there were 36 responses (compared to 16 in the previous year). All 36 responses fully supported the proposals in questions 1 to 3 on the funding formula. Of the 36 response received, 30 (83%) supported the proposal to transfer 0.5% from Schools to High Needs Block and 6 (17%) did not. Some respondents provided comments in general these recognised the pressure on the High Needs Block and the need for further work to review costs.

Comments from the consultation were noted under Appendix B. One of the members asked that the same 1.84% MFG increase for mainstream schools be also applied to special schools however, Mr D New clarified that this funding formula does not apply to special schools.

C Thomas explained that some other Local Authorities were giving an increase in the top ups rate for special schools. D New explained that the level of place funding set at £10k was set by Government and was not within the gift of the LA to predetermine. C Thomas informed members that although special schools received a high proportion of top up funding, they should not be penalised for this. S White agreed that the funding allocation for special schools against primary and secondary was not equitable and should be looked into further as part of M Gray's strategy.

Following a unanimous vote, Members RESOLVED:

- to support the proposals for the school s funding formula for 2020/21
- to agree that 0.5% (£0.66m) be transferred from the schools block to the high needs block in 2020/21.

10. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no matters raised.

11. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the date and time of the next Schools' Forum meeting be held on Tuesday 21st January 2020 at 1:30pm in Room C at the Education Centre Stockton Sixth Form College.