

# Schools Forum

A meeting of Schools Forum was held on Tuesday, 23rd June, 2020.

**Present:** Primary Maintained School Headteachers: Mrs C Taylor and Mrs S Richardson

Primary Governors: Mrs M Dowson and Mr C Wilson

Secondary Maintained School Headteacher: Mr R Henderson

Secondary Academy Headteacher Representatives: Mrs L Spellman, Mrs J Armstrong and Mr S White

14-19 Representative: Mrs L Graham

Observer: Councillor L Evans

**Officers:** Mr D New – Senior Finance Manager; Mr M Gray – Director of Children Services; Mr G Waller – Senior Accountant; Mrs V Housley – Chief Advisor; Mrs S Hewitson – Secretary to the Forum

**Also in attendance:** Mr A Metcalfe, Gazette News

**Apologies:** RESOLVED that the apologies for absence submitted on behalf of Councillor C Clarke, Mrs C Thomas and Mrs M Tudor be received with consent.

## **SCH 21/20 Appointment of Chair**

Previous Chair, Mr L Russell's term of office ending as Trade Union Representative, a ballot was being undertaken but had not yet concluded. It was discussed between members and Mr S White volunteered to Chair the meeting.

RESOLVED that Appointment of Chair be deferred to the Autumn Term.

## **SCH 22/20 Declarations of Interest**

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

No interests were declared

## **SCH 23/20 Minutes of the Last Meeting - 21st January 2020**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2020 be approved.

## **SCH 24/20 Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **SCH 25/20 Schools Budget and Balances Outturn 2019/20**

.A copy of the Schools Budget Outturn document for 2019/20 and appendix was circulated in advance of the meeting for members consideration.

Appendix 1 showed the planned spend against the actual outturn for 2019/20 on the Schools Budget. The figures were all prior to any academy recoupment. Overall, there was a £4.424m deficit which included a brought forward overspend in high needs budgets of £2.577m from 2018/19 and the 2019/20 in-year planned deficit of £263k. This represents a reduction of £0.066m compared with the projected £4.490m overspend presented to the Schools Forum 21st January 2020. The reasons for significant variances between planned and actual spending for the full year were outlined A-E as follows:

- a) Individual Schools budget – £349K underspend. This related to an underspend on Early Years (305k) plus savings on academy recoupment (£44k). The 2019/20 Early Years block funding would be adjusted by ESFA in the current year based on the Spring 2020 census.
- b) Top-up funding maintained providers – overspend of £228k. This was mainly £244k additional top-ups relating to other LA Maintained Special Schools and £39k increased transport costs for excluded pupils at the PRU, offset by savings of £42k contingency for top-ups for SBC maintained schools.
- c) Top up funding academies and free schools – The overspend of £1.08m was made up of additional places/top-ups to SBC academies, additional top-ups to other LA academies and free schools and further reductions in DSG HN funding relating to the import/exports plus additional Post-16 top-ups to FE colleges and placement costs of excluded pupils.
- d) Top-up funding non-maintained and Independent Providers - The overspend of £0.85m related mainly to additional Agency placement costs (£0.8m) plus unbudgeted costs of excluded pupils, home tuition and independent assessments and therapy sessions.
- e) Pupil growth / Infant class sizes - £0.194m underspend due to lower than anticipated call on growth funding.

The in-year net overspend was £1.847m which was made up of the £0.263m planned in-year High Needs deficit plus a further £2.156m High Needs overspend but offset by savings of £0.572m on other DSG areas (including £32k on de-delegated items as outlined below). Therefore the overall cumulative deficit of £4.424m had been carried forward into 2020/21.

#### De-Delegated Items

It was clarified at Schools Forum on 8th October 2019 that should there be an underspend on any of the de-delegated services then it would be a Schools Forum decision on how the outstanding funds would be spent (in 2018/19 the remaining funds were transferred to support the High Needs deficit).

For the 2019/20 financial year, there were a couple of variances relating to de-delegated items which are as follows:

- a) Contingencies - £22k unused contingency for the correction of errors in the funding formula funding was not required.
- b) Staff costs – supply cover. Re-imburement costs for Trade Union Facility

time were lower than expected by £10k.

#### School Balances

Overall maintained school balances stood at £2.953m. This was a decrease of £0.751m between 2018/19 and 2019/20. Of this, £0.465m relates to Academy conversions, with £0.286m being a reduction in Maintained School balances which were now 6% of budget.

At 31st March 2020 only one school was carrying a deficit which was the same number as in the previous year. The Authority had worked with the school and there was a plan in place to address the position.

Mr New welcomed any questions from members.

Mr White questioned if there was a strategic overview of HNF over the next 12-24 months. Mr New clarified that the COVID-19 update document included HNF update and the next report in the Autumn Term would update members on the position. COVID-19 had caused delay in progressing the planned high needs savings.

A member questioned if the expenditure agency places had increased since the last report. Mr New confirmed there had been an increase since the last report as there had been some issues with special schools and they were looking at mitigating actions around this.

Mr Gray outlined the following areas of focus as discussed at the Schools Forum meeting in the Autumn term:

- Early Intervention and Assessment
- Inclusive Mainstream Schools
- Schools and SEN Support
- Changing Provision
- Alternative Provision
- Joint Commissioning (this had been on hold temporarily due to COVID-19)

Mr Gray also referred to the Valuing SEND project also being commenced.

#### Recommendations

The Schools Forum was asked to note the unused balance on the de-delegated items (as per paragraphs 4 and 5 above) and to decide on how it wishes to utilise these funds.

The Schools Forum was asked to note the final position for 2019/20 and agree to use the underspends in the other blocks (subject to any decision on the de-delegated items above) against the overspend in the High Needs Block.

RESOLVED that members agreed to use both the underspends against the overspend on High Needs.

**SCH  
26/20**

#### **COVID-19**

The COVID-19 document was distributed to members in advance of the meeting for information.

As part of the national response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Government announced that Schools, Colleges and Early Years Settings would close after 20th March 2020 except for the children of key workers and vulnerable children.

The COVID-19 crisis had provided an unprecedented situation for the DfE, the Local Authority and schools with a requirement to rapidly develop policy to respond to events which had never been faced before. Plans have had to continually evolve in response to the many and varied challenges encountered as the situation has unfolded and as recovery arrangements were announced.

#### School Funding

The Department for Education (DfE) had published guidance for local authorities and schools on funding whilst they were experiencing the impact of COVID-19 on the management and delivery of education.

Schools would continue to receive their core funding allocation, as determined by the Local Authority for maintained schools for the 2020/21 financial year. Academies and non-maintained special schools would continue to receive their core funding allocations through the general annual grant (GAG) until August 2021. This would happen regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure and would ensure schools could continue to pay staff and meet other regular financial commitments during this time.

Local authorities will also continue to receive their high needs budget and should continue to pay top-up and other high needs funding to schools. This was to ensure that the employment and payment of staff supporting schools with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) could continue.

Where schools paid top-up or other funding for pupils attending alternative provision (AP), or paid for other SEND or AP services, these payments were expected to continue so that teachers and support staff could be paid in accordance with their existing employment contracts.

If placements and services for the summer term had not yet been agreed, schools should fund on the basis of previous patterns of placements and commissioning.

In these challenging times the Government was encouraging all schools to continue to manage their budgets in the most effective way possible, and to redirect their existing resources to best support all their pupils, particularly vulnerable children and children of critical workers, in the current circumstances.

#### Exceptional Costs

The DfE recognised that in some instances where schools had remained open, they may already have, or will over the coming weeks, face additional costs as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. In some instances, schools may not be able to cover these costs from their existing resources.

The DfE had recognised the following areas where schools may face additional costs as a result:

a) Increased premises related costs (including utilities and resources needed to

keep the school open, such as hygiene services) associated with keeping schools open during the Easter and/or summer half term holidays, for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, over and above the costs that schools would have faced in other circumstances

b) Support for free school meals (FSM) for eligible children who were not attending school, where those costs were not covered by the FSM national voucher scheme - this covered:

i. costs to schools arising before the introduction of the national voucher scheme

ii. costs where schools were providing free meals to children for whom the national voucher scheme was inappropriate (for example, because there were no participating supermarkets locally or schools were providing meals directly)

c) Additional cleaning – required due to confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases, in line with COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings, over and above the cost of existing cleaning arrangements.

d) If a school faced other, extraordinary costs to deliver appropriate support to their pupils through this period that were not covered by the list above and could not be met by existing budgets, they should contact the DfE. The DfE planned to publish further guidance in June with more details of the financial support offered through this process.

The funding will be available to schools that were unable to meet such additional costs from their existing resources, or which they could only meet by drawing down on reserves and undermining their long-term financial sustainability. The DfE were not expecting schools to make a claim against this funding if they were anticipating that they would be able to add to their reserves in the 2020/21 financial year.

There are cash limits on the level a school can claim. There may be some exceptional instances where individual schools would face additional costs that were higher than these limits. In these circumstances, schools would be able to make a case for increasing the limit when they submitted a claim for additional funding.

For the purposes of claims, it was important for schools to keep good financial and non-financial records of costs.

#### Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)

Government guidance had confirmed that there were some limited circumstances where schools may be able to furlough staff and access the funding from the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) to support up to 80% of an employees' usual monthly wage costs, up to £2,500 a month. This support was accessible where privately generated income had either stopped or been reduced and there were staff that were typically paid from these private income streams. The DfE guidance indicated that schools should first seek to make the necessary savings from their existing budget or consider options to redeploy these staff before furloughing them and should only seek support through the CJRS after all options had been considered. No maintained schools

in Stockton have furloughed staff.

#### High Needs

COVID-19 had caused delay in progressing the planned high needs savings of £0.728m set out in the approved 2020/21 Schools Budget and an update would be brought to the Schools Forum in the Autumn Term.

#### Data Collection

To help reduce the burden on educational and care settings during COVID-19, the DfE had cancelled or paused all but the most essential data collections, services and requests from educational and care settings until the end of June 2020. Those cancelled include the Section 251 Budget 2020/21 return and School Census (summer 2020).

#### Procurement Policy Note

During the COVID-19 outbreak Schools and Academies still needed to rely upon the commitment and support from their contracted suppliers to either maintain services and supplies, or to quickly to return to a business as usual supply situation in the near future.

It was recognised that during this challenging time that circumstances may arise where some suppliers may struggle to meet their contractual obligations, and thus the need to alter requirements, temporarily suspend some services, or change ways of working.

The Government had issued a Procurement Policy Note (PPN 02/20) and further additional guidance for state funded schools which sets out information with regard to potential Supplier Relief.

#### Laptops for Disadvantaged Children

Under a DfE backed scheme, disadvantaged children were being given free laptops and tablets in a bid to make remote learning easier during the coronavirus lockdown. This was being facilitated through partners at ONE IT.

Mr New also referred to the recent Government announcement introducing a package of £1 billion; £650 million allocated to support children who had fallen behind with their school work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and £350 million for catch up tutoring sessions for disadvantaged children. Further details were awaited.

Members expressed their thanks and gratitude to the Local Authority for their excellent support to schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chair personally thanked Mr Gray for the regular email correspondence issued to schools keeping them up to date with pertinent Government/LA guidance. Members felt that schools had been unified during this difficult time and had continued to work together supporting vulnerable children. Members highlighted that the support received from the LA for vulnerable children had been exceptional.

The Chair informed members that the Year 7 catch up grant had been replaced with the £1 billion package. He also had reference for a plan for each pupil by the end of the term. This would be a tutoring programme specifically for vulnerable children where 25% of the costs were anticipated to be funded by

schools.

RESOLVED that members note the COVID-19 report.

**SCH  
27/20**      **Forward Plan (including next academic years meeting dates)**

The Forward Plan document was circulated in advance of the meeting for members consideration.

A member asked if the delegation/de-delegation decision in the autumn term decision making be extended to give the LA more time to receive responses from maintained schools. Mr New explained that the initial report would be presented at the meeting on 6th October giving maintained schools time to discuss and consult between themselves prior to a decision at the following Schools Forum meeting scheduled on 24th November.

RESOLVED that members approve the forward plan and scheduled meeting dates for 2020/21.

**SCH  
28/20**      **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was no other business.

**SCH  
29/20**      **Date and Time of Next Meeting**

RESOLVED that the date and time of the next Schools' Forum meeting be held on Tuesday 6th October 2020 at 1:30pm at the Education Centre Stockton Sixth Form College or remotely (subject to the circumstances prevailing at the time).