

SCHOOLS FORUM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS
HELD ON 12 NOVEMBER 2024

PRESENT:

Primary Academy Headteacher Representative: Mrs J Armstrong and Ms S Richardson (Chair)

Primary School Governor Representative: Mr R Powner

Secondary School Governor Representatives: Mr C Wilkinson

Secondary Academy Headteacher Representatives: Mr R Parkinson and Mrs C Humble

Secondary School Headteacher Representative: Mr R Henderson

Special School Representative: Mrs C Thomas

Trade Union Representative: Mr L Russell

Pupil Referral Representative: Mrs G Warby

LA Representative: Councillor C Clark

OFFICIALS: Mr A Bryson – Chief Accountant
Mr G Waller – Senior Accountant
Mrs S Hewitson - Secretary to the Forum

OBSERVER: Mr D Leane - BHCET

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED that the apologies for absence were received from Mrs A Swift, Mrs J Stanyard, Mr E Squire, Mr E Huntington, Mrs V Housley, Mrs M McCarthy, Mr J Faulkner, Mr A McClurg, Cllr. L Evans and Mrs L Spellman be accepted by the Forum.

2. 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.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING – 8 OCTOBER 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2024 be approved by members of Schools' Forum.

4. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK RE DELEGATION / DE-DELEGATION 2025/26

In the absence of Mr E Squire who had undertaken the consultation regarding delegation and de-delegation for 2025/26 for maintained primary schools had submitted his apologies for the meeting. Therefore Mrs H Gregory fed back to the Forum on the consultation and advised there was an overwhelming amount of responses to the poll and the purpose was to retain the status quo.

Votes were unanimous on contingencies, staff costs and behaviour and were a majority of 10:1 on Support to School and School Improvement.

Mr R Henderson, the only maintained secondary representative agreed to use the de-delegated funds on the areas outlined in the report previously circulated for 2025/26.

RESOLVED that:

- That the primary maintained Headteachers agree to de-delegate funds as outlined within the report for 2025/26
- That the secondary maintained school Headteacher agrees to de-delegate the funds for 2025/26 as outlined within the report.

6. SCHOOLS FUNDING CONSULTATION

Following the last Schools' Forum meeting, the Schools National Funding Consultation document had been shared to all which seeks views from maintained schools, academies and free schools on the proposal in respect of Schools and High Needs Budgets for 2025/26. This deals specifically with the 0.5% transfer between the schools and high needs blocks (additional consultation questions would be sent out once the authority had received NFF details from the Government).

The council recently held a consultation on school funding arrangements for 2025/26. This took place between 9th October and 6th November. A copy of the consultation document issued to schools was attached at Appendix A to this report.

Of the 78 schools consulted with, 44 responses were received (compared to 28 in the previous year). The responses included a block of 11 votes from one Academy Trust and a block of 5 votes from another.

The breakdown of the 44 responses (which was a 56% response rate) was shown in the table below:

LA Primary	10
LA Secondary	1
Primary Academy	25
Secondary Academy	4
AP / Special Academy	4
TOTAL	44

Further detail on each of the proposals and consultation responses were provided. A log of consultation response comments were set out in Appendix B.

The council consulted on a 0.5% (0.5% or £900k whichever greater) 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 attached at Appendix A.

Of the 44 responses received 23 (52%) supported the proposal, 20 (45%) did not and there was 1 response with no view. From the 23 that supported the proposal, 13 of the respondents were from Academy Trusts with the remaining 10 from maintained schools. From the 20 responses that did not support the proposal, 1 was from a maintained school and 19 were from Academy Trusts (including a group response of 11 replies from Bishops Hogarth and a group response of 5 from Prince Regent Street Trust).

It was highlighted that the response from Bishop Hogarth was provided after the 5pm deadline on the 6th November set for returns. Mr Bryson was asked to include Oxbridge Primary as part of Prince Regent Street Trust response even though it had not yet converted.

	Yes	No	No Views	Total
Academy	13	19		32
Maintained	10	1	1	12
	23	20	1	44

As noted above, 11 of the responses were from the academy trust with the most schools under its umbrella within the borough. If this group response was excluded from the results above 23 (70%) of the respondents would have supported the proposal with 9 (27%) not supporting it.

Excluding Bishops Hogarth	Yes	No	No Views	Total
Academy	13	8		21
Maintained	10	1	1	12
	23	9	1	33

If the responses from academy trusts were only counted as 1 reply each then 23 (77%) of the respondents would have supported the proposal with 6 (20%) not supporting it.

Group Trusts 1 Reply	Yes	No	No Views	Total
Academy	13	5		18
Maintained	10	1	1	12
	23	6	1	30

The Chair observed there were a high amount of responses in comparison to last year which was positive.

In response to a question, Mr Bryson clarified that he detailed all the responses in the tables in the report and appendices and advised that Schools Forum had the overall vote despite the consultation process.

In response to a question, Mr Bryson explained that Academy Trusts can respond on behalf of all schools within the Trust.

Several members highlighted they felt that the votes received from Bishop Hogarth shouldn't be accounted for as it was received after the deadline time of 5pm.

Schools Forum was asked to consider and vote on a proposal to transfer 0.5% (0.5% or £900k whichever greater) from the schools block to the high needs block in 2025/26, therefore after a vote was undertaken, it was:

RESOLVED that the majority of Schools Forum were in favour of the proposal to transfer 0.5% or £900k (whichever greater) from the schools block to the high needs block in 2025/26. One member was not in favour.

7. SCHOOLS FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS 2025/26 (VERBAL UPDATE)

Schools funding arrangements had been delayed in July 2024 and Mr Bryson was still awaiting further information. Mr Bryson highlighted the following key points:

- Due to a delay in the schools funding arrangements, there was another part of the consultation which included the NFF which would need approval from Schools Forum. Another meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 18th December 2024 at 1:00pm. The Clerk would issue an invite to all members.
- Prior to the meeting Mr Bryson had received additional details in relation the National Funding Formula. It was noted that overall funds are increasing by £2.3 billion, (£1 billion of this would be allocated to high needs), funding provided to mainstream schools through the teachers' pay additional grant (TPAG), the teachers' pension employer contribution grant (TPEG) 2024 and the core schools budget grant (CSBG) will be rolled into the schools NFF for 2025 to 2026.
- The National Insurance increase was due next year where there would be an additional grant provided to schools which would be outside of the schools funding formula.
- The 0.5% figure would be identified at the next meeting.

In response to a members question, the MFG applied to special schools will be the same as applied to mainstream schools.

RESOLVED that an additional Schools' Forum meeting would be held on Wednesday 18th December at 1pm.

8. BUDGET MONITORING

A copy of the budget monitoring report and appendix was circulated to members prior to the meeting. This paper provides members of the Forum with the current projected outturn position on the Schools Budget based on information to the end of September 2024.

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget was set for 2024/25 assuming a small overall saving of £17k, intended to reduce the DSG deficit down to £3.78m at the end of 2024/25. This was in-line with Delivering Better Value (DBV) submission to DfE in January 2024.

However, based on a review of projected expenditure on High Needs at quarter 2 it was now expected that this target will not be met. Instead, an in-year overspend of £536k is now expected which will increase the cumulative deficit brought forward from 2023/24 of £3.8m up to £4.3m instead of the budgeted position of £3.78m. This revised position would be reflected in the medium-term financial plan.

The projected overspend described above does not take account of any potential offsetting savings on other DSG blocks. For example, there was a significant increase in funding for the Early Years Block relating to the Governments childcare expansion programme. The funding

rates that were set were based on estimated activity levels and once the data had been analysed for the summer and autumn terms 2024, quarter 3 should provide a more accurate picture

Mr R Powner and Mrs J Armstrong joined the meeting.

The Special School Representative had several queries regarding the figures displayed and the impact it would have on Special Schools. She asked if they were confident with the estimates provided. Mr Waller explained the figures take everything into account they were aware of so far however, the deficit may reduce later.

The Chair advised Stockton Council was normally ahead of the curve with most things however she still acknowledged there was something not working with the budget. She was hopeful after quarter one it would be at zero and not at an overspend.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

10. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that:

- a. An additional meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 18th December 2024 at 1.00.p.m
- b. The next meeting of Schools Forum would be held on 21st January 2025 at 1.00 p.m.