

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Wednesday, 22 February 2017
Robertson House, Stevenage

ATTENDANCE:

Chair	Alan Gray
School Members	Richard Haynes (Vice-Chair), Alisdair Skinner, Brian Frederick, Tracy Prickett, Don Leavy, Tony Fitzpatrick, Robert Fielden, Liz Hitch, Samantha Jayasuriya, Nick Rowlands, Sarah Lalis, David Shaylor, Denise Skewis, David Allen, Jan Liversage, Paul Johnson, Karen James,
Non- School Members	
Substitutes	Frances Manning
Officers	Simon Newland, Catherine Tallis, Cheryl Faint, Jonathan Burberry, Debbie Orton, Lin Obrien, Melany McQueen, Ian Hamilton
Apologies	Zoe Hancock, Alison Saunders, Helen Blay, David Williams, Morris Bright,
Observing	Cllr Mark Watkin, John Grubb, David Williams (NUT), Judi Billing

1. Minutes of Last Meeting & Matters Arising

Minutes of meeting held on 16 January were agreed and taken as an accurate record.

2. High Needs Budget 2017-18

Jonathan Burberry reported to seek support from the Forum for the High Needs Budget proposals for 2017/18. Agreement was also sought to the central retention of funding for statutory duties previously funded through the ESG in respect of maintained special schools and pupil referral units.

The report set out how proposals were arrived at on the Budget and Strategy Development Fund, and the supporting financial information was further explained. It was commented by members of Forum that the proposal to fund some cost pressures in high needs was not consistent with the situation in the schools block, where cost pressures are not being funded. However, Forum noted that the proposals in the paper reflected the view of the High Needs Sub Group.

Simon Newland drew to the attention of Forum likely future changes in meal prices to be charged to Special Schools by Hertfordshire Catering Ltd (HCL), and reminded Forum of the discussions at Forum in December and January. The likely average meal price increase was expected to be £1, with an aggregate cost across the sector of c£280,000. He reported that the representative body for Special Schools had asked that Forum be requested to agree an additional allocation of funds to cover this exceptional inflation.

Three options were set out for Forum:

1. To agree the request and to amend the budget accordingly.
2. To refuse the request.
3. To agree to consider the matter further in the context of the planned review of special school top-ups. In that context it was noted that the budget proposals included funding for this purpose in 2017/18 and a mechanism for providing additional support to schools in-year if they faced financial difficulties linked to a top-up rate that the review had concluded was insufficient.

After discussion, it was concluded without dissent that the third approach was the most appropriate.

Regarding early years, it was suggested that there should be further work on clarifying the split of responsibilities between the high needs and early years' blocks. The early years' workstream of the SEN Strategy Review will look at this.

Forum voted as follows:

- To support the budget proposals in this paper
- To support the proposed use of the Strategy Development Fund

Vote:

For: 17 Against: Nil

Forum agreed the central retention of £1 per place in maintained special schools and pupil referral units to cover the statutory duties previously funded through the ESG.

Vote (maintained special schools and maintained PRUs only):

For: 3 Against: Nil

3. High Needs Items from SEND Work Streams 2017-18

Debbie Orton reported to seek the support of the Forum for a number of High Needs proposals from the SEND workstreams for 2017-18.

In response to questions on the proposal regarding funding for PNI provision it was noted that:

- under the current funding arrangements, designated schools receive a lump sum regardless of whether they have eligible students on roll or not;
- the students funded through the existing PNI funding arrangement and who are not currently in receipt of exceptional needs (EN) funding, will be reviewed.

Forum agreed the recommendations in section 2.1 of the paper

Vote:

For: 17 Against: nil

4. Early Years Budget – Proposed Centrally Retained Items

Melany McQueen reported to seek the approval of the Forum for the holding of Early Years Central Budgets in 2017-18.

In response to questions it was noted that the early years workstream of the SEN Strategy Review would:

- oversee the development of proposals for using the Early Years SEN Inclusion Fund and report back to Forum;
- review the Ludwick Enrichment Group.

Forum agreed the recommendations in section 8.1 of the paper.

Vote:

For: 18 Against: nil

5. Early Years Funding Changes 2017-18 – Proposals for Implementation

Melany McQueen reported and outlined the interim results following an Early Years Funding Consultation that took place recently. Proposals have been made for implementation from April 2017.

It was noted that maintained and PVI sectors had some differences in the makeup of their costs. For example maintained settings are required to have a qualified teacher. However, PVI settings are required to have a lower ratio of children to staff.

Forum endorsed the recommendations in section 6 of the paper.

Vote:

For: 18 Against: nil

6. Primary and Special Schools Meal from April 2017

Lin O'Brien attended to update the Forum on the cost and other pressures being experienced by Hertfordshire catering and the consequential impact on HCL's selling price. The report set out a new structure of incentives and discounts which HCL planned to offer. In the light of financial pressures particularly on wages and food inflation HCL will be increasing meal prices by 5p per meal in April 2017.

HCL will be also be introducing a volume related rebate for all schools serving on average over 250 meals per day over the whole financial year.

In discussion it was noted that the DfE funding for universal free infant meals would not be increased and thus the increased cost of meals would be another pressure to be met from schools' budgets.

Forum agreed that the recommended meal price to be charged to parents by schools should be increased to reflect the 5p increase in HCL Selling Price and the revised price communicated via the Schools Bulletin.

7. National Funding Formula for Schools - Update

Jonathan Burberry provided more information to the Forum about the National Funding Formula (NFF) for schools.

Primary and secondary representatives on Forum outlined their perspectives on the changes proposed in the NFF and the impact on their sectors of the ongoing real terms reductions in funding.

Forum concluded that the key issue was lack of funding for education and that the impact of budget reductions would be a deterioration in the quality of provision (including pastoral care). It was noted that investment in education saves money in other public services, such as teenage mental health services.

Forum requested that the Authority's response to the DfE consultation be made available as soon as possible, to inform consultation responses from individual schools and heads' associations.

The Chair recommended that schools lobby politicians about the level of education funding.

8. Forward Work Programme

Special Schools update to be added to the Work Programme.

9. Any Other Business

No Other Business was raised.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of Forum will be held on:

Date: Wednesday, 26 April 2017

Time: 1.00pm - 4.00pm

Venue: HDC, Robertson House, Stevenage