

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Monday 14 January 2019
Robertson House, Stevenage

ATTENDANCE:

Chair	Alan Gray
School Members	Richard Haynes (Vice-Chair), Tom Evans, Tony Fitzpatrick, Corina Foster, Matt Gauthier, Anna Greetham, Frances Manning, Tracy Prickett, Nick Rowlands, Robert Smith, Robert Fielden, Jan Liversage, Gemma Williamson, Dave Allen, Kit Davies, Sara Lalis
Non-School Members	Cllr Adam Mitchell;
Substitutes	Jeremy Turner (substitute for Alison Saunders)
Officers	Simon Newland, Abi Asimolowo, Cheryl Faint, Tania Rawle
Apologies	
Observing	Cllr Terry Douris, John Grubb, Cllr Mark Watkin

Alan Gray opened the meeting advising Forum of the sad death of Brian Fredericks, currently an Academy Member of Forum. Alan referred to the substantial and lengthy contribution Brian had made to education in Hertfordshire, initially as an HCC officer and latterly in a voluntary capacity on Forum. Forum asked for its condolences to be expressed to Brian's family.

Two new members were introduced to Forum: Abi Asimolowo will be representing HCC Finance and Cllr Adam Mitchell replaces Cllr Tim Hutchings, who has changed portfolio.

Forum noted that Jonathan Burberry had retired from full time work with HCC and asked for the minuting of its thanks for the high quality of the support he had provided to members of Forum over many years.

1. Minutes of last meeting & matters arising

The minutes were recorded as accurate.

Richard Haynes had a query on Integrated Therapies which he would raise under Item 7: Forward Work Programme.

2. Schools budget 2019-20 – Abi Asimolowo

Previous reports covering the 2019-20 Schools Budget were considered at the September and November Forum meetings. The DfE has now announced the 2019-20 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and the data to be used to calculate 2019-20 budget shares for primary, secondary schools and academies, under the school funding formula. This, together with the updated information on budget pressures and savings, enables final decisions to be made regarding the Schools Budget for 2019-20.

The main surprise from the December DSG announcement is that the DfE is making

available substantial additional resource for High Needs. The high needs block allocations calculated through the national funding formula for High Needs have been enhanced by additional allocations of £2.862m in both 2018-19 and 2019-20. A further increase in the 2019-20 High Needs DSG of £701k results from updating the data for pupil numbers in Special Schools. Thus overall there has been an increase of £3.563m in the 2019-20 High Needs block compared to the previously estimated figure.

Given the specific source of the additional funding, it was suggested to Forum that funds arising from the consequential underspending on the HLN DSG in 2018/19 should be carried forward into 2019/20, but ring fenced for future use against HLN service pressures.

A query was raised around the High Needs Block (Item 5.4) and whether there is any indication how this money will be used given the delay in the review of the ESCs and pressures on the service. It was noted that Forum had previously allocated £0.25M additional funding for ESCs and the allocation of this will be review in detail at the next meeting.

Forum was therefore asked:

- (i) To note the revised budget position
- (ii) To agree that the full, increased value of Headroom should be allocated to schools as detailed in para 6.2

VOTE					
For	18	Against	-	Abstain	-

- (iii) To agree the budget proposals for High Needs as set out in para 8.3, and in particular that any unspent element of the additional funding for the current year of £2.862m be carried forward to 2019-20 and ring-fenced for use to support future high level needs activity

VOTE					
For	18	Against	-	Abstain	-

3. **Schools funding formula – finalisation of primary and secondary formula funding factors 2019/20– Simon Newland**

Tony Fitzpatrick declared an interest in the proposals relating to the secondary school split site factor item and did not vote or participate in the relevant part of the debate.

A consultation on changes to the primary and secondary funding formula for 2019-20 was undertaken in December. The proposals consulted on were those agreed in principle by Forum in November. Responses to the consultation showed majority support for all of the proposals. In consequence Forum agreed:

- i) That the order of priorities for the distribution of additional funding should be as follows:

Priority 1: delivering a 1% increase in the unit funding rates of formula factors across primary and secondary (except for the secondary lump sum, which is almost at its maximum permitted level, and premises specific factors such as rates)

Priority 2: as there is resource available after delivering priority 1, using this resource to increase the primary low prior attainment factor (including London fringe uplift where applicable), up to an amount of £1m.

Priority 3: as there is resource available after delivering priorities 1 and 2 then allocating this using the following ratio:

90% for the general uplift (as per priority 1),
10% for the specific primary increase (as per priority 2).

- ii) Keeping the level of the Minimum Funding Guarantee at -1.5%.
- iii) Reducing the unit funding rate of the primary low prior attainment factor so that the total amount of funding allocated through this factor is not affected by ending the use of data from the old (pre 2013) EYFSP
- iv) Amending the unit funding rate for the primary and secondary free school meals factors as outlined in section 6.2 of this paper, to take account of the significant increase in the percentage of primary pupils entitled to free school meals.

VOTE					
For	18	Against	-	Abstain	-

- v) Increasing the funding provided through the secondary split site factor as outlined in the consultation document.

VOTE					
For	17	Against	-	Abstain	1

Members of Forum also requested at some future stage additional information about changes in the pattern and level; of eligibility and take up of Free School meals across the county.

4. Changes to the scheme for financing schools – Cheryl Faint

This paper presented the outcomes of the consultation with maintained schools and Education Support Centres on changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools from April 2018.

There were 2 main areas of change. As regards the first, Forum agreed to the proposed general updates as set out in the paper.

The second proposal related to the introduction of new requirement to submit a second year budget forecast along with the annual budget submission on 31st May each year. Forum raised concerns about the ability of schools to accurately forecast income and the assumptions currently used.

It was agreed that the Scheme Of Financing Schools would be amended to include the additional 2nd year forecast requirement but only on the basis that;

1. Members of Forum were satisfied that information on which to base income forecasts was effective in supporting strategic financial planning.
2. That information on how to stress test budget plans and vary income predictions was made available.

It was agreed that a working group be set up to look at these specific areas and that representatives from Primary Headteachers would be members of that group. It was agreed that on condition that these concerns were resolved, the deadline for submission of the 2nd year forecast would be 1st October 2019.

Maintained schools and ESCs only were eligible to vote on the outcome of the consultation and were asked to agree the changes to the scheme as referred to in Sections 4 and 5 of the report, subject to the conditions set out above being met.

VOTE					
For	10	Against	-	Abstain	-

5. Central schools service block budget approval 2019/20 – Simon Newland

In November Forum was informed that the anticipated level of CSSB DSG for next year would be reduced in cash terms of £17,000 from 2018/19 levels. Forum at that stage decided that the CSSB budget would be set at the level of incoming DSG, and noted a balancing reduction needed to be identified. The level of incoming DSG has now been confirmed as £5.727m, representing a reduction of £26,000.

Forum was also informed of the range of services funded from this DSG Block, which included Admissions and Appeals, servicing of Schools Forum, the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE), former ESG retained duties and DfE arranged licenses. It was noted that, even if no inflation was provided for these services there would need to be savings identified to balance the budget. There were, however, two additional cost pressures in relation to the costs of SACRE and centrally-procured licences. With the reduction of DSG an overall saving of £89K was required. It is proposed to meet these from savings in the costs of administering admission appeals, resulting from bringing charging policies for Academies and Maintained schools into line with each other.

This is not a straightforward change and cannot be immediately implemented. A further detailed report on the proposal would therefore be brought to Forum in June.

Members also requested a further report setting out what the funding allocated to SACRE would be used for, and how this would benefit schools.

Members also discussed minor changes to the drafting of the criteria for access to the falling Rolls fund, to reflect its application to 2019/20, as set out in the Annex provided to Forum. It was noted that the allocation cap had inadvertently be described as applying to 2018/19, whereas this should have read 2019/20.

Forum was asked and agreed:

- (i) To note its decision on 28th November that CSSB expenditure should be set at the level of incoming CSSB DSG.
- (ii) To note that no inflation will be provided to any CSSB-funded services.
- (iii) To note the cash reduction of £26,000 in CSSB DSG for 2019/20 compared with 2018/19.
- (iv) To agree the following changes to the CSSB budget previously agreed by Forum:
 - a) An increase in the budget for centrally-arranged licenses of £38,000 (previously estimated at £20,000)
 - b) A provision of £25,000 for the costs of SACRE
 - c) A reduction of £89,000 in the budget for administration of Admission Appeals, to balance CSSB DSG income with budgeted expenditure.
- (v) To note that a further report on the implementation of the reduction in Admission Appeals budgets for 2019/20 and subsequent years will be submitted to Forum in June.
- (vi) To agree the changes to the criteria for the falling Rolls fund as set out in Annex A, rolling forward relevant dates by 1 year.

VOTE					
For	18	Against	-	Abstain	-

Forum also requested a further report setting out what the funding allocated to SACRE would be used for, and how this would benefit schools.

6. Growth fund criteria 2019/20 – Simon Newland

Forum was asked to note the contents of the paper and the proposed minor changes to the wording to reflect key dates having moved on by one year since the criteria were last approved for 2018/19. These were set out in the following sections of the paper. Forum was asked to agree these changes and in particular:

- Section B, Additional Growth Fund Allocation – Secondary Schools/Academies becoming All-Through – Eligibility Criteria
- Section D, Infant Class Size Protection

VOTE					
For	18	Against	-	Abstain	-

7. Forward work programme – Simon Newland

Simon Newland outlined papers due to come to future meetings

8. Any Other Business

Integrated Therapy – clarity sought whether the new service would commence from September.

Budget Monitor –Q3 monitor can be presented at the February meeting.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of Forum will be held on:

Date: Wednesday 27 February 2019
Time: 1.00pm - 4.00pm
Venue: Ash Room, HDC, Robertson House, Stevenage