

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Wednesday 18 September 2019
Robertson House, Stevenage

ATTENDANCE:

Chair	Alan Gray
School Members	Richard Haynes (Vice-Chair), Dave Allen, Carole Bennett, Jessica Breakwell, Kit Davies, Geraint Edwards, Robert Fielden, Matt Gauthier, Anna Greetham, John Grubb, Sara Lalis, Jan Liversage, Frances Manning, Wayne Morris, Tracy Prickett, Nick Rowlands, Alison Saunders, Nikki Smith, Robert Smith, Gemma Williamson
Non-School Members	Cllr Mark Mills-Bishop
Substitutes	
Officers	Simon Newland, Jonathan Burberry, Debbie Pettit, Cheryl Faint, Juliet Whitehead, Tania Rawle, Melany Knowles, Andrew de Csilléry, Tracy Warner, Deborah Roberts, Claire Saban, Michael Ramshaw
Apologies	Tom Evans, Cllr Judi Billing, Alan Henshall
Observing	Cllr Mark Watkin, Cllr Terry Douris, Herbert Riley (HCC Finance)

Welcome

Newly elected members to Schools Forum were welcomed and introductions were made.

Election of office holders

Nominations were invited for the Chair and Vice-Chair.

Alan Gray (Chair) and Richard Haynes (Vice-Chair) were unanimously re-elected to their respective posts.

1. Minutes of last meeting & matters arising

The minutes were recorded as accurate.

Matters arising

Page 1: Update on Integrated Therapies: clarity was sought whether anything was circulated about OT assurance.

Action: Caroline Inglis to refer back to previously circulated documents and follow up as appropriate.

Action: Julie Reddish to be invited back to the November meeting.

Page 2: SEND Special Advisory Services: clarity sought on the vacancy factor. Jonathan Burberry explained that the existence of the vacancy factor reflected forecasting of the impact of vacancies, not a management action or target to limit spending through slowing the pace of recruitment.

2. Final DSG allocation and updated schools budget 2019-2020 (Jonathan Burberry)

Jonathan Burberry introduced this paper giving details of the final DSG for 2019-20 and how this compares to what was budgeted. Almost all the additional £4.2m of grant relates to early years and in particular is due to the increase in numbers for 3 and 4 year olds.

Forum noted the changes in DSG and in the Schools Budget since January.

Forum agreed to support the carry forward of the remaining DSG resources to 2020-21, as outlined in section 3 of the paper.

VOTE					
For	20	Against	-	Abstain	-

3. Schools budget monitor 2019-20 – End of Summer Term 2019 (Debbie Pettit)

This paper, introduced by Debbie Pettit, informs the Forum of the monitor position for the 2019-20 Schools Budget as at the end of the summer term 2019. The projected underspend for the financial year of £1.702M is broken down by DSG block in the table in the paper.

It was noted that the net overspend figure of £2.1m shown for high needs understated the scale of the overspends on high needs. This is because the £6.2m SEN Strategy Development Fund budget has not been committed and therefore constitutes an underspend, offsetting overspends in other budgets.

Latest figures received since the monitor was completed indicate a further increase in the forecast spending on high needs, so the reported figures are likely to change adversely.

The Forum asked a number of questions about the high needs overspend including why it had not been possible to estimate the original budgets more accurately.

Forum noted the end of Summer Term monitor position and its likely impact on next year's budget.

4. Update from High Needs Sub-Group (Simon Newland)

Jonathan Burberry outlined the background to the two recommendations in the paper that the Forum was asked to agree.

Forum agreed:

- the request to delegate the decision to approve high needs funded places for 2020-21 to the High Needs Sub Group and to agree to submit these changes to the ESFA,
- the disapplication of the MFG in the calculation of the special school top up rates for 2020-21 (as outlined in section 6 of the paper).

VOTE					
For	20	Against	-	Abstain	-

Simon Newland then gave an overview of the minutes of the High Needs Sub Group meeting (annex A of the paper).

The minutes give details of key areas of overspending. Work is taking place on forecasting and the SEND Transformation Programme will support this. A budget pressure had been identified in the post-16 area and the scale of this is being reviewed. The overspend on ENF was likely to be covered next year as a part of the additional funding anticipated for complex needs in mainstream schools. Overspends in other areas would, however, impact uncommitted resources available for 2020/21.

The three- year budget forecast in section 5 of annex A indicates emerging funding shortfalls in 2021-22 and 2022-23 once account is taken of the need for developments in funding for complex needs in mainstream and special school banding changes. The final position will depend on the level of overspending and whether there are further increases in high needs DSG after 2020-21.

Simon's introduction was followed by a discussion of the issues raised:

- several headteachers commented that their schools were not receiving top ups from other local authorities for non-Hertfordshire pupils.
- it was suggested that the £500k high needs capital spend could perhaps be met from the high needs capital grant,
- the question was raised as to whether the financial impact of policy changes on exceptional needs funding had been fully costed.
- it was observed that all parts of high needs provision were overloaded and there is a need to understand what the strategy is to address this.

Note: High needs will be a standing agenda item for future Forum meetings

5. Initial report on Schools Budget Strategy (Jonathan Burberry)

Jonathan Burberry introduced this paper which assesses the resources from the DSG which may be available in 2020-21 and reviews the estimated pressures in the Schools Budget together with the difference between these and the potential resources available.

Regarding the use of carry forward in 2020-21, it was noted that:

- discontinuing the use of £3.2m of carry forward to support primary and secondary budget shares would equate to a reduction of approximately 0.4% in budget shares,

- the question was raised whether there is an additional resource for school family workers. (Regulations prevent the budget being provided through the historical commitment route from being increased.)

Action: SN/JB to confirm

Forum noted the list of budget pressures and savings.

Forum agreed the following:

- To endorse the approach of providing for inflation as a budget pressure in each block
- To endorse the use of up to £3.2m of the DSG carry forward to support the schools, early years and central services block budgets in 2020-21, in combination with a review of how to increase the resource available for school family workers.
- To support the approach that the budgeted spend for high needs should be set at the level of the high needs block.
- To support the approach that the budgeted spend for schools, early years and central services should be set at the level of the relevant DSG blocks plus an allocation of carry forward as outlined in section 8.2 of the paper.
- To agree to establish a small working group of primary and secondary school Forum representatives, to work with officers to develop proposals for allocating the amount of headroom in the schools' block budget.

VOTE					
For	20	Against	-	Abstain	-

The members of the working group set up as per recommendation (f) above (to work with officers to develop proposals for allocating the amount of headroom in the schools' block budget) are:

Richard Haynes (primary maintained head teacher)
 Nick Rowlands (primary maintained head teacher)
 Robert Fielden (academy governor, cross-phase MAT)
 Matt Gauthier (academy head teacher, all-through)
 Geraint Edwards (secondary maintained head teacher)

6. Item 6

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

7. Minimum Funding Guarantee exceptions and pupil number variations (Jonathan Burberry)

Matt Gauthier declared an interest.

The paper (presented by Jonathan Burberry) outlines the proposed MFG exceptions and the proposed pupil number variations for the 2020-21 budget shares. The Authority intends to apply to the DfE for approval for the MFG exceptions and negative pupil number variations in sections 5 and 6 of the paper.

Negative pupil number variations for bulge classes leaving.

The Authority has received concerns from one school affected by this. The school had not expected the reduction to be made and has not budgeted for it.

Samuel Ryder and Astley Cooper

The deadline for the second window for submitted MFG exceptions is now known to be 20th November. Thus, any MFG exception that might be decided on, following the impact assessment, will have to be submitted before the next Forum. The MFG exception could be withdrawn following the Forum meeting.

If the Authority wished to make a transitional allocation of funding outside of the MFG protection process, this would require DfE approval. Such approvals are only given for one year at a time.

Forum agreed the following recommendations:

- a) To support the Minimum Funding Guarantee exceptions outlined in section 5 of the paper.
- b) To support the negative pupil number variations for 2020-21 outlined in section 6 of the paper.
- c) To support the positive pupil number variations for 2020-21 outlined in section 7 of the paper.
- d) To support an assessment of the impact of the loss of MFG protection on Samuel Ryder and Astley Cooper outlined in section 8 of the paper.

VOTE					
For	17	Against	-	Abstain	3

8. De-delegation of funding for School Improvement and HfL contract funding for 2019/20 (Simon Newland)

The paper sought agreement from Schools Forum to a funding package to cover the costs of work delivered by Herts for Learning through its contract with HCC. This entailed approving a contribution from centrally held DSG and agreeing a proposal for consultation with maintained schools on the de-delegation of funds to cover the work undertaken specifically and only on maintained schools. This year's proposal included a proposed 2% increase in relation to the likely inflation in HfL's costs. In previous years there had been no increases in contributions in respect of inflation and HfL had absorbed these through efficiencies. This was not tenable for future years.

Whilst specific approval was sought for the funding package for 2020/21, Forum was

also asked to agree in principle to support a similar package for the following two years.

Oversight of the contract on behalf of schools and Forum was undertaken by a working group which met periodically, and which agreed the presentation schedules of services that HfL provides under the contract. A number of issues of detail were raised which it was agreed would be considered by that working group when next it met and also with PHF Executive.

Forum was asked to note the recommendations and voting members were asked to vote accordingly:

- 3.1(i) **(all members voting)**; to approve the funding assumptions and package set out in para 6.1 in relation to services provided by HfL for 2019/20.

VOTE					
For	20	Against	-	Abstain	-

- 3.1(ii) **(all members voting)**;

- (a) £853,000 of Central Services Block DSG is allocated to this purpose
- (b) £255,000 of Early Years DSG is retained centrally for this purpose
- (c) £291,000 of HLN DSG is allocated for this purpose

VOTE					
For	20	Against	-	Abstain	-

- 3.1(iii) **(all maintained mainstream school members voting, by phase)**; to consult schools on £20.50 per pupil being de-delegated by all maintained mainstream schools to support school improvement costs within the contract

PRIMARY VOTE					
For	6	Against	-	Abstain	-

SECONDARY VOTE					
For	1	Against	-	Abstain	-

- 3.1(iv) **(all maintained school, including special and ESC members voting)**; to consult schools on a proposal that £5 per pupil/place is de-delegated/retained to support other costs within the HfL contract; and that each Special School and ESC pupil (place) is weighted for the purposes of this recommendation as equivalent to 5 mainstream pupils

VOTE					
For	10	Against	-	Abstain	-

- 3.2 Forum was also asked **(all members voting)** to agree in principle to support a similar funding package for 2021/22 and 2022/23 including increases annually linked to inflation, provided that school budgets on average increase at a faster rate.

VOTE					
For	20	Against	-	Abstain	-

9. Hertfordshire's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)
(Juliet Whitehead)

A paper was brought to Forum to provide an update on the work of SACRE, given that the budget to cover the costs of this work falls within the central Schools Services Block.

Schools Forum was informed that the management arrangements for SACRE have gone through a transitional period recently with a new Chair, Cllr Mark Watkin and Juliet Whitehead becoming the new LA Serving Officer. Herts for Learning are continuing to provide administration and clerking support through a formal commission with HCC. However, for the specialist adviser role, HCC has gone out to tender and officers hope to have completed the procurement process by the beginning of October with a new Specialist RE Adviser for SACRE in place.

Note: Cllr Watkin thanked Juliet Whitehead for the excellent work carried out on the SACRE journey.

10. Schools capital repairs and maintenance (Claire Saban/Michael Ramshaw)

Forum was advised the HCC Building Management Team is now called the Design & Capital Delivery team. The new Head of Service, Mike Ramshaw, was introduced.

Forum was updated on progress of the 2019/20 repairs and maintenance programme which includes 43 schemes with a total value of £13.7m:

- 26 schemes are in construction or complete
- 9 schemes are out to tender for works contracts
- 8 schemes are in pre-construction (feasibility/design/procurement)

The programme is being closely managed to offset budget pressures, with remaining pre-construction and construction stages being phased throughout Autumn 2019 and Spring 2020.

11 projects from previous programme years have been completed in the last quarter and 7 are still in progress, with costs being drawn from the 2019/20 budget to bring them to conclusion.

Forum was asked to note the risk of budget overspend in 2019/20 and future programme years is being managed by:

- More prudent programming to reduce over-commitment
- Completion and financial closure of projects from previous programme years
- Comprehensive review of budget monitoring tools / accuracy of financial data

- Improved reporting and analysis of budget commitments outside of capital repairs and maintenance works programme

Forum requested an opinion on whether SCA funding represents adequate investment, in light of the condition of some building stock. The Programme Manager agreed this is challenging and the DfE grant has reduced year on year, while school needs increase. In addition to a fully committed programme for 2019/20, there are currently £13.3m of capital works bids which have been accepted but await identification of funding for any budget to be made available.

The Chair thanked the Design & Capital Delivery Team for their delivery of the works and reiterated that the amount of DfE funding provided to support the programme is outside of the team or Forum's control.

11. **Managed Moves (Fair Access Protocol)** (Deborah Roberts)

Officers had previously attended Forum in February 2019, covering the work of the integration team and work in relation to exclusions. This report provided an update, advised Forum of proposed changes to the funding of managed moves and sought additional funding, largely to be provided to schools, to help manage the transition of pupils into schools.

Forum was asked to note the DfE proposed change to Fair Access Protocol to include CIN children which could lead to significant increase in workload for the Fair Access Team. There has been a significant increase in mover-ins and pupils with complex needs as well as an increase in the number of young people pending EHCPs. Forum was advised that if funding is not forthcoming, then it is likely that more young people will risk permanent exclusion. Funding could come in part from the CSSB and part from HLN DSG, depending on the characteristics of the pupils concerned.

Forum was asked to agree on the following in preparation for a more preventative model with a focus on early intervention through the managed move process:

- (i) In principle to add an additional £66,000 to complement the current re-integration budget.
- (ii) That the funding of this should be considered alongside other priorities for the Central Schools Services Block/High Level Needs when these are agreed.

VOTE					
For	8	Against	-	Abstain	9

Note: This item is to come back to Forum in 2020.

12. **Forward work programme**

The forward work programme and agenda for the next meeting was reviewed

13. **Any other business**

No further business was raised.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of Forum will be held on:

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