

Minutes

Meeting of Schools Forum

Wednesday 11 October 2023 4.00pm
Teams Meeting

Present:

Liz Travis	Holy Trinity CE Primary (In the Chair)
Karl Newell	Crompton House Trust
Rob Higgins	The Cranmer Trust
Stewart Ash	Pinnacle Trust
Tracey Cavanagh	Holy Rosary RC Primary school
Anthony Leighton	The Cranmer Trust
Nigel Yeo	Trade Union representative

Also Present:

Matthew Bulmer	Director of Education, Early Years and Skills
Gerard Jones	Managing Director, Children and Young People
Amber Burton	Assistant Director SEND & Inclusion
Andy Cooper	Senior Finance Manager
Vicky Gibbons	Senior Accountant
Lee Walsh	Assistant Director Finance

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Paul McGrath and Ian Windeatt.
- 1.2 Members were requested to declare any business, pecuniary and personal interests. No declarations were made

2 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- 2.1 It was noted that the following adjustment to the minutes was required:

Section 3.4 –

The DSG for 2023-24 has been updated and the current position, in comparison to that projected at the March 2023 meeting, means there will be an expected surplus of £2.5m, rather than £2.3m. This is due to the additional in-year surplus for 2022-23 of £335,000 less the additional spending in Special Schools of £164,000.

should be changed to read:

The DSG for 2023-24 has been updated and the current position, in comparison to that projected at the March 2023 meeting, means there will be an expected surplus of £2.517m, rather than £2.344m. This is due to the additional underspend carried forward from 2022/23 of £0.335m plus a change in schools block expenditure of £0.002m less the additional projected spend for Special Schools of £0.164m.

RESOLVED: that after the above amendment the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 2023/24 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT UPDATE & 2024/25 ESTIMATE & ADDITIONAL FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 3.1 Andy Copper updated the Forum on the latest position for the DSG for 2023/24 & 2024/25.
- 3.2 Since the last Schools Forum meeting the projected outturn for 2023/24 had increased by £0.676m from £2.517m to £3.193m. The change was in the main as consequence of increased funding within the High Needs Block for special free school funding and funding for imports & exports.
- 3.3 Since the last Schools Forum meeting, information received in July 2023 provided indicative DSG allocations for 2024/25. Following this, the ESFA provided local authorities with updated provisional allocations after realizing they had made an error with their calculation of the Schools Block.
- 3.4 Members were provided with information in the paper detailing the main changes and features of the 2024/25 funding announcements.
- 3.5 Whilst the error did not impact on the forecasted outturn for 2024/25 presented to Schools Forum, as a consequence Schools Block income reduced by £2.248m and consequently the budget requirement for schools reduced by the same amount.
- 3.6 Since the last Schools Forum meeting the projected outturn for 2024/25 had increased by £1.260m from £2.765m to £4.025m. The change was, in the main as consequence of increased funding within the High Needs Block for special free school funding and funding for imports & exports plus the change in the projected underspend brought forward from 2023/24 offset by additional expected costs in special schools, Post 16 & EHCP's in mainstream schools.
- 3.7 A summary of the High Needs block for 2015/16 to 2024/25 (both before and after movement from the schools block) was provided to members. The projected cumulative balance on the High Needs Block (after including school block transfers) was projected to be a surplus of £0.352m at the end of 2024/25.

- 3.8 Further announcements had also been made by the ESFA regarding additional funding for Early Years, Teachers pay additional grant and additional support for schools in financial difficulty. Details of these can be seen in sections 6 – 8 of the report.

RESOLVED: Schools Forum:

- Noted the changes to the DSG allocation for 2023/24
- Noted the latest settlement of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2023/24 of £321.956m.
- Approved the latest deployment of Dedicated Schools Grant 2023/24 of £319.662m.
- Noted the 2024/25 budget update.
- Noted the financial position of the High Needs Block and the historical movements the Schools Block
- Noted the updated recovery plan shown in table 9
- Noted the additional funding announcements detailed in section 6,7 & 8
- Noted the proposed DSG budget for 2023/24 for each funding block

4 FORWARD PLAN

- 4.1 Members were informed of the proposed agenda items for the next meetings of Schools Forum.

The proposed meeting dates are set out below:

- 22 November 2023
- 17 January 2024

5 DELIVERING BETTER VALUE (DBV) IN SEND

- 5.1 Amber Burton provided the Forum with an update of the progress made with DBV and the High Needs Block & SEND reforms. Details included the following:

- Funding application for DBV was successful and agreed on 15th September 2023 with £1m worth of investment funding coming in
- Can be used for frontline support & SEN support including specialist teachers
- Evaluation needed along the way re the effectiveness of any new posts and future sustainability and what is working well for schools and settings
- Change programme investment- indicative £1m of funding (over two years)
- Costs in independent sector – numbers going into the independent sector have reduced but costs have increased significantly (which is out of the LA control).

- Conference planned for schools and partners on 28th November to look at all the programmes that are going on and the Improvement Programme for SEND. Using it as a day to celebrate the opportunities that we have and to make sure we are listening to schools and settings about what they want that to look like. Invites and agenda to be sent out.
- Additional requests for Notional SEND funding from schools which we can't do as would have to be an agreed policy that's fair and open and transparent across all schools in Oldham. We won't agree additional notional SEND funding unless we know that a school is significantly disadvantaged for exceptional reasons, which doesn't happen very often. Amber proposed information being made available about how SEND funding works (including the High Needs Block as a guide to that) and proposed to circulate through the conference on 28th November

6 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 6.1 Liz Travis raised issues around engaging the Schools Forum group to make informed decisions particularly because of the complexity of the papers and members also not being fully clear about the remit of the Forum. Whilst they are approving spend how much are they holding to account? Liz asked the group if they fully understand what the Forum is and what their role is.
- 6.2 Karl Newell responded saying that it is sometimes difficult for members to get their head round that they are representing their groups/sectors rather than individual organisations. Some members sit with their Business Manager pre the meetings to try and unpick the financial content of the papers.
- 6.3 Rob Higgins reiterated Karl's point re the sectors they represent and that it is about finding information, sharing it back and where there is challenge from different sectors bringing it back to the Forum. Historically there was a Fair funding Group which was a sub-group of the Forum that would make recommendations to Forum.
- 6.4 Andy Cooper confirmed that the majority of reports have been in the same format for a number of years and were done at a point when we had a significant deficit. Andy also confirmed that the LA would be more than happy to change reports and their contents, and that they are here to service the Forum. The LA would be more than happy to address the format in which Forum want information presenting and also if there is further information required that currently isn't being provided.

ACTION: The content and format of report for future meetings will be reviewed. Terms of Reference and Roles & Responsibilities of Schools Forum to be brought to a future meeting.

(There being no further business, members were thanked for their attendance and the meeting was declared closed at 16.45)

Signed: _____ Chair

Date: _____