Oldham Council

Minutes

Meeting of Schools Forum

WEDNESDAY 10 July 2024
via Microsoft Teams
at 4.00pm

Present:	Liz Travis	Holy Trinity CE Primary (In the Chair)
	Nigel Yeo	Trade Union Representative
	Stuart Ash	Primary Representative
	Karl Newell	Crompton House School
	Anthony Leighton	The Cranmer Trust
	Nigel Woodworth	New Bridge Academy
	Rob Higgins	Blue Coat School
	Tracy Cavangh	Holy Rosary RC Primary School
	Paul McGrath	St Thomas Werneth
Also Present:	Matthew Bulmer	Director of Education
	Tony Shepherd	Assistant Director of Education
	Amber Burton	Assistant Director SEND and Inclusion
	Vicky Gibbons	Senior Accountant
	Clare Roper	Senior Accountant
	Victoria Hayes	Senior Accountant
	Jean Coombs	Clerk

1	**WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**
1.1	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
1.2	Apologies for absence were received from Iain Windeatt.
1.3	Members were requested to declare any business, pecuniary and personal interests. No declarations were made.
2	**MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**
	RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
	MATTERS ARISING: There were no matters arising.

3	**SCHOOLS FORUM CONSTITUTION INCLUDING APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR**
	Tony Shepherd gave un update on the review of the Schools Forum Constitution. Main points referred to:
3.1	A vacancy that was to be filled was for the Post-16 representative, and as this appointment had no voting rights, the appointee – Stuart Ash, has transferred to represent the Primary schools. Simon Jordon, from Oldham College, is to become the new Post-16 representative.
3.2	There is a vacancy for a Primary maintained school representative. The Primary schools' group will be asked to suggest a representative.
3.3	Three governors have expressed an interest in representing governance and a recommendation will be tabled through the Chair.
3.4	There is a vacancy for a maintained Secondary school representative, but as all three remaining maintained Secondary school are moving towards academisation this post will remain vacant for now.
3.5	There is still a vacancy for a Vice-Chair, and as no one at the meeting volunteered to take on this role, Tony Shepherd and Liz Travis will discuss how to move forward on this. Members were asked to e-mail Tony or Liz if they are interested in being the Vice-Chair.
4	**DSG FUNDING UPDATE**
	Vicky Gibbons gave an update on the final out-turn for 2023-24, and updated forecasts for 2024-25 and 2025-26. Main points referred to:
4.1	The final out-turn figures were presented in a table and members were asked to note that these accounts were subject to audit at the DfE.
4.2	There is an in-year surplus of £2.187m, and when this is added to the brought forward amount and the Growth Fund underspend, it results in a final underspend of £3.702m. This is £141,000 higher than was forecast in January 2024.
4.3	There is a reduction in the forecast surplus for 2024-25 of £237,000, resulting in a carry forward of £4.15m.
4.4	The projected surplus for 2025-26 is also reduced by £356,000 resulting in a carry forward of £4.5m.
4.5	The analysis of movements table show the areas where the income and expenditure is predicted to have changed since the last report. There is additional 2-year-old funding which is offset by the anticipated expenditure; and additional income from out of borough placements into Oldham, which is offset by the additional expenditure.

4.6	A table, with a new format, shows the changes in each block of funding in 2023-24 showing an overspend due to a reduction in the numbers of pupils in nurseries. These pupil numbers are based on the January 2024 pupil numbers which are expected to be adjusted with a resulting increase in funding of £200,000. The in-year surplus for 2024-25 and 2025-26 have been reduced in the table due to additional expenditure, especially in the high needs block.
4.7	Vicky reminded members that it was important that the DSG does not go into a deficit position. The demands on services are increasing and there is a need to keep an in-year surplus. Work is continuing with the Delivering Better Value initiative and other groups.
4.8	A Schools Forum member asked if the projected out-turn for the high needs block was in overall surplus, and also pointed out that the Special schools are under pressure with increased pupil numbers and they had not had a year-on-year increase in funding since 2014. Vicky pointed out that about £8m had been moved from the Schools block to the high needs block since 2016-17 and that there is re-banding of SEND in maintained schools which could end up taking up the projected surplus of £4.5m. Amber Burton added that the banding structure is being reviewed and some information will be sent out very soon. Newbridge school is to pilot the scheme and the aim is to get the fairness back into the system for SEND pupils and schools. There is also a yearly increase of about 15% in the number of EHCPs being granted. Specialist maintained school places are being created with element 3 funding, and the budget needs to be able to withstand these pressures.
4.9	A question was asked as to how the numbers in special schools have changed. The response was that at Newbridge over the last five years the number of pupils has increased from 350 to 600. But Amber pointed out that many of these places are taken by out of borough pupils from Rochdale and Tameside, and that where there are available places these cannot be kept open for Oldham pupils.
	RESOLVED: that Schools Forum note: (i) the draft 2023/24 out-turn for the Dedicated Schools Grant; and (ii) the current DSG budget for 2024/25 and 2025/26 and the forecast consolidated position as at 31 March 2026.
5	**SCHOOLS BALANCES**
	Clare Roper reported on the school balances at 31 March 23 compared with 31 March 2022. Main points referred to:
5.1	When the data was gathered there was an increase from £8.3m to £8.5m, however some of the increase was for three schools that have converted to academies and therefore some of the surplus balances will be transferred to the academies. The overall picture is that the surplus balances are fairly stable. In

	response to a question about the timescales for surplus balances to be paid to academies, Clare reported that this is done within four months of agreement of the balance.
5.2	All schools can have a surplus of up to 12% and nine schools hold more than the 12%. This compares with eight schools in 2022-23. Six of the nine schools have submitted plans for their surplus funds and three have yet to submit a plan. These plans are under review and an update will be provided at the next meeting.
5.3	In response to a question, Clare reported that those schools that have a deficit are to make plans to balance their accounts by the following year, and failing that they could apply for a licence to balance their funds over a three-year period under the licence deficit scheme.
6	**PROPOSED DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS FOR 2024/25**
	The proposed meeting dates are: Wednesday 23 October 2024 Wednesday 15 January 2025 Wednesday 26 March 2025 The election of a Vice Chair is to be on the next agenda.
	(There being no further business, members were thanked for their attendance and the meeting was declared closed at 16.35pm).
	Signed: _____ Chair Date: _____