

SCHOOLS FORUM

THURSDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2021

PRESENT: Martin Tinsley (Chairman), Chris Tomes (Vice-Chairman), Isabel Cooke, Michael Wallace, John Fletcher, Andrew Morrison

Also in attendance: Councillor John Baldwin, Councillor Maureen Hunt and Councillor Donna Stimson

Officers: Oran Norris-Browne, James Norris, Kevin McDaniel, Sarah Ward and Tracey Anne Nevitt

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Joolz Scarlett, Sarah Cottle and Maggie Callaghan.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

MINUTES

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 18th November 2021 be a true and accurate record.

BUDGET MONITORING AND FORECAST 2021/22

The Schools Forum considered the report regarding the budget monitoring and forecast for 2021/22.

James Norris, the Head of Finance for Achieving for Children, introduced the report by stating that the overall forecasted position for March 2022 had moved from a projected deficit of £1.8 million to £1.2 million. A decrease of £600,000.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that there had been a one-off favourable movement within the pupil growth fund, with an underspend of £537,000 having been reported. He added that there were no more applications expected for the rest of the financial year.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that within the early years block, a final settlement had been agreed upon by the ESFA relating to the 2020/21 financial year clawback. Over £1 million was identified as being the final figure compared to a provision of £800,000 resulting in a further one-off underspend in the region of £260,000.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said with regards to the high needs block, there was an adverse movement of £336,000. This included new provision for pupils placed since the start of the academic year. He advised that the current forecast included a contingency of £450,000 for future demand of pupils placed within the current financial year. He stated that the forum should note that, based on previous year's trends, it was expected that this future demand would materialise during the final quarter of 2021/22 due to new school placements.

The deficit position at the end of the year was noted as now being just under £3 million and when compared with the total budget allocation, this equated to just 2.2%. The last reported

position was £3.4 million and 2.6%, showing a favourable decrease. The Chairman stated that this was very pleasing news.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that it was apparent that the Schools Forum at the November meeting were keen for the SEMH service to continue operating and he confirmed that this service would now continue in 2022/23. He added that with reference to the deficit management plan, this would be brought to the April Schools Forum meeting, with any comments being welcomed from forum members before then.

Kevin McDaniel, the Director of Children's Services said that many of the services provided by the borough relied heavily on partners within the Health Service. He added that an external agency named 'Attain' had been employed to work closely with the borough in early 2022 on how to reshape the model that was currently in place for service delivery. He added that along with changes with ICS, relationships were being formed and that things were starting to look positive with regards to the SEMH service and service provision.

SCHOOL BUDGET FUNDING 2022/23 CONSULTATION REVIEW

The Schools Forum noted the contents of the School Budget Funding 2022/23 Consultation Review.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children apologised to the forum members for the lateness in publishing the report but explained that this was due to the consultation ending only a short time before the meeting date.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that only 12 schools had responded to the consultation, with around 30 responses usually being received. He asked forum members for suggestions on how schools could be more encouraged in participating in future consultations.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that schools supported the Looked After Children formula, which was an optional factor. Schools also supported using headroom to fund lump sum allowances. Feedback received mainly from the Secondary sector included whether more pupil-led factors should be considered for use of the headroom.

Councillor Hunt asked why 50% of school respondents to the consultation were unsure. Mike Wallace also asked this, and also requested further context and a breakdown of what split of respondents were Primary, Secondary, and Nursery schools.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children confirmed that there were 2 Secondary schools and 10 Primary schools that responded. He admitted that there was a current sense of uncertainty existing as the results of the consultations had not yet been publicly shared, which could have potentially led to some schools being unsure on how to respond at the current time. He suggested a possibility could be to invite schools to participate again, once more information was available. The Chairman added that this would only be possible once more information was made available from the Department for Education (DfE).

The Director of Children's Services said that the current 2-year picture showed that by the start of the financial year of 2023/24, the local authority would receive £0 from the DfE for school improvement, representing a full removal of the grant, currently being received at £144,000. The proposal put forward by the DfE is that maintained schools should be funding the school improvement service, rather than the DfE paying for it directly.

Mike Wallace said that he was unaware of the points that the Director of Children's Services had made and suggested that therefore schools should be re-approached with some clarity and once they had all the facts, they would hopefully be able to make a definite informed decision.

The Chairman noted that the Schools Forum was very academy heavy and said that only 2 members of the forum would be able to vote on behalf of the maintained schools of the whole borough. He therefore suggested that it would be best to defer the decision to the next Schools Forum meeting in January. Mike Wallace welcomed this delay and agreed that he and Chris Tomes did not represent all the maintained schools in the borough wholeheartedly.

Isabel Cooke asked if there was an approximate costing that could be given to the forum. The Chairman replied by saying that the cost for the next couple of years was £70,000 for 2021/22 and £140,000 for 2022/23. The Director of Children's Services confirmed to Isabel Cooke that this would only apply to maintained schools, as academies were already contributing financially to this.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children stated that £450,000 was currently held within a ring-fenced budget of previously de-delegated funds that had built up over the last few years. He added that in Summer 2022, an exercise would be carried out to delegate this money back to maintained schools. Chris Tomes asked if this money was ring-fenced for maintained schools. The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children confirmed this to be the case.

The Chairman asked for the consultation to be distributed to schools for comment before the January Schools Forum to ensure as many responses would be received as possible. The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children confirmed this would happen and added that this would be purely for the school improvement grant element. This was confirmed by the Chairman.

Mike Wallace asked for the notice to schools to be crystal clear with the information set out easily, to encourage schools to respond. The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children noted this.

Chris Tomes asked if the governance training still came under the school improvement grant. The Director of Children's Services said that the training would continue and was separate to the school improvement funding.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the decision on the School Improvement grant be brought to the January 2022 meeting of the Schools Forum.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said that in terms of the pupil growth fund, the allocation had not yet been received for the next year, but it was anticipated to be less than the current rate. He asked the forum if a vote on the remaining de-delegation rates should be brought back to the January Schools Forum meeting too.

The Chairman asked Mike Wallace and Chris Tomes if they would be open to agreeing the first 5 points of section 6 of the report. Both Mike Wallace and Chris Tomes agreed to pass these.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the proposed de-delegation rates set out in section 6 of the report be passed along with the existing de-delegation rates for both Primary and Secondary schools.

The Head of Finance for Achieving for Children said with reference to the early year's formula, under the terms of the operational guidance, 95% of the allocation is allocated via formula to the settings with 5% retained for central early years services. This would be the basis for the proposal of the consultation undertaken in January 2022. The forum noted this.

The Chairman asked if the forecasted falling numbers of school places in Windsor could be brought to the next Schools Forum meeting. The Director of Children's Services agreed, however, added that it may have to be the following meeting as the agenda for the January Schools Forum was already quite full following on from decisions made within this meeting.

The Chairman agreed this and ended the forum meeting by thanking everybody for their hard work and wishing everybody a happy Christmas and New Year.

The meeting, which began at 2.00 pm, finished at 2.50 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....