

SCHOOLS FORUM

Thursday 19 January 2023

Present virtually: Chris Tomes (Chairman), Isabel Cooke and Andrew Morrison

Also in attendance virtually: Councillor Maureen Hunt and Councillor Sayonara Luxton

Officers in attendance virtually: Oran Norris-Browne, James Norris, Clive Haines, Sarah Ward and Tracey Anne Nevitt

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Joolz Scarlett & Sarah Cottle.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2022 were a true and accurate record.

Schools Forum Membership Framework 2022/23

The Schools Forum considered a report on the Schools Forum Membership Framework 2022/23.

James Norris, Head of Finance for Achieving for Children, introduced the report by stating that attendance numbers on the Schools Forum had begun to dwindle in recent times. The strategy was to launch a recruitment campaign to fill vacant positions that had opened up on the Forum. The recommendation was for the Forum to note the report and discuss arrangements for the recruitment process.

James Norris said that the previous target number of forum members was 17, however the plan was for this to be decreased slightly to 15 members. The rationale behind this was due to the limits to recruitment, but also a positive reason was for the Forum to become more effective and efficient in their decision making. There were currently 5 members, and therefore 10 places needed to be filled. He then asked the current members what their ideas were for recruitment to the Forum.

Andrew Morrison said that they just needed to be direct and approach persons who had not attended the Forum before. He said that at the next headteachers conference, he would be more than happy to approach people and ask them if they would like to attend. James Norris said that historically the Forum had been running at around 10 or 11 members at best. If multiple persons wished to take up the same single position, then that would be dealt with as and when it arose. Currently the Forum also only met 4 times per year (a maximum of 6 times), so it was less of a commitment compared to the past.

The Chair asked if a meeting of the primary school headteachers was occurring in the near future. Isabel Cooke said that she was not aware about this, but that there was an appetite from her to approach a range of different people who had not attended the Forum before in

the past. She would approach some of her academy governors, to see if they would be interested.

Clive Haines, Deputy Director for Education, said that previously communications would be sent out to headteachers and governors boards, where they would collect expression of interest forms. Clive Haines also said that this could be done for nurseries, private and voluntary. The Chair agreed with this cause of action.

ACTION: Expression of Interest forms to be sent by the AFC team to headteachers, governor boards and nurseries within the borough.

Andrew Morrison said that it was important to put out some information about what the Schools Forum was and what its processes were. The Chair agreed that this needed to be included in the marketing of the Forum and asked for the results of the campaign to be brought back to the next forum.

ACTION: Results of the recruitment campaign to be brought to the next Forum.

AGREED: That the Schools Forum noted the report on the Schools Forum Membership Framework for 2022/23.

Budget Monitoring and Forecast 2022/23

The Forum considered the written report titled Budget Monitoring and Forecast 2022/23.

James Norris said that the report provided an update on the projected financial position for 2022/23 and the projected deficit also. Forum members were to note the report. Section 3.1 of the report stated that the current budget notification was £141 million within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), with net retained funding of £72 million, which consisted of £36 million in respect to maintained schools delegated budgets and £35 million central schools' budget, which included Central School Services, Early Years and High Needs.

James Norris said that there was a projected net in-year underspend of £197,000, which was favourable considering as of 31 March 2022, there was a net deficit of around £2 million. He then stated that the overall position had not changed since the last report to the Schools Forum. He added that section 3.9 noted a planned contingency of £210,000, which was previously £400,000. The remaining £210,000, if not required would be favourable. The position that was being reported, was where officers were expecting the borough to be at this time during the financial year.

James Norris said that the Delivering Better Values programme was being actively engaged with. Feedback from the Department for Education (DfE) was positive, and that data had been submitted to them and it was with them for analysis, and it would be fed back to the borough in due time.

The Chair asked if the £210,000 underspend mentioned in section 3.9 had been off set against the deficit. James Norris replied by saying no and that they anticipated new high-cost provisions occurring between January and March 2023. This money would be used for this, and if it did not materialise then it would contribute positively to the overall deficit position.

AGREED: That the Schools Forum noted the report titled Budget Monitoring and Forecast 2022/23.

School Budget Funding 2023/24

The Schools Forum considered the written report titled School Budget Funding 2023/24.

James Norris said that section 4 set out the different sections of the DSG funding blocks. Section 5 set out the DSG funding for 2023/24 and it provided a comparison between the current 2022/23 and the proposed 2023/24 funding levels. The early years indicative funding was shown to be £11.2 million. He asked forum members if they had any additional questions or ideas on this, as it was due to go out to consultation in the near future. James Norris said that any changes would be effective from 1 April 2023.

The Chair asked if there would be any financial risks attached to that. James Norris confirmed that he did not believe so and that they were looking to utilise the full £11.2 million. Clive Haines said that they were wishing to pass as much as possible on to the children.

The Chair asked when schools would see the indicative budgets come through. James Norris said that this would hopefully be by 28 February 2023, following on from confirmation by both the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and the Executive Director of this also.

James Norris said that section 7 set out the school funding overview and that a consultation had occurred on this. The National Funding Formula had not come through yet, however there were some minimum funding guarantees that were known and had been met. The second model was the recommendation made by officers, following on from the feedback from the school consultation. The final signoff would be made by the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and the Executive Director of this also. However, all options submitted had to be affordable before it went to the DfE.

James Norris said that section 8 set out the high needs funding and said that they would receive a 3% funding increase for 2023/24. Section 8.5 reflected the planned top up bandings of 4.5%. He added that they would also receive a further 3.4% increase in funding on a per place funding basis.

The Chair asked for some clarity on appendix A within the report. James Norris replied by saying that it showed the movement between the current rates and the proposed rates for 2023/24. It attempted to demonstrate the impacts that different models would have. Tracey Anne-Nevitt, Finance & Business Partner for AfC, said that the 2 options that were shown on the appendix differed to what was consulted on. This was due to changes in data sets.

Isabel Cooke asked about sparsity funding and how much special schools would receive. James Norris said that this had been asked in the consultation and strong support was shown towards profiling it in over a number of years. Isabel Cooke said that only 2 or 3 schools would be impacted by this and that schools that would not be impacted, would wish for them to be placed on the lowest amount. James Norris appreciated the comments made and hoped that morally schools would not have taken this course of action. Isabel Cooke said that it was something to definitely consider as every school was battling with its individual budget.

The Chair said that going forward, perhaps only the schools that would be impacted by a budgetary change should have a say on it. Tracey Anne-Nevitt said that the borough was not currently funded on the national funding formula rates currently and that there had also been a big swing in data, which squeezes funding further. She said that proposals would exist in the future to tackle this and increase funding once more flexibility was obtained.

AGREED: That the Schools Forum noted the report titled School Budget Funding 2023/24.

The meeting, which began at 2.00 pm, finished at 2.40 pm

Chair.....

Date.....