

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Monday, 23 June 2014 at The Board Room - Municipal Building, Widnes

Present:

J. Rigby, Secondary Academy Representative
 M. Constantine, Special Schools Representative
 E. Cargill, Primary School Governor Representative
 J. Coughlan, Primary School Representative
 D. Stanley, All Through School Representative
 L. Feakes, School with Nursery Unit
 R. Collings, Primary Representative - Infant School
 K. Landrum, Primary Representative - VA School
 A. Brown, Nursery Schools Representative
 D. Anderson, Pupil Referral Unit
 A. McIntyre, Children & Enterprise
 A. Jones, Financial Services
 A. Jones, Democratic Services
 N. Unsworth, Financial Services
 A. Hough, Substitute for Dianne Moran (Primary Academy)
 L. Fox, Substitute for Pamela Wright (Secondary Academy)

Action

SCF1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Andrew Keeley and Syd Broxton.

SCF2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING & MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record.

SCF38 – Development of a Family Support Service – Ann McIntyre would write to those schools that had been identified as meeting the criteria outlining the support available and the contribution required by the schools.

Ann McIntyre

SCF47 – Early Years Funding 2014-15 – Ann Jones would advise members regarding the funding factor for low level SEN funding for PVI Nursery Schools.

Anne Jones

SCF3 MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

The following changes were noted with regards to the membership of Schools Forum:

- The Principal of Wade Deacon, Pamela Wright, would represent the Secondary Academy sector until

September 2014; she would then be replaced by Lynn Fox, the new Principal of the school. (*Lynn was in attendance at today's meeting as an observer, as Pam Wright could not attend*);

- Mark Dennett, the Pupil Referral Representative (PRU, has stepped down from the Forum and would be replaced by Drew Anderson the Principal. From September 2014 Nigel Hunt, the new Principal, would represent the PRU;
- A vacancy had been created for a Post 16 representative and Riverside College had been approached to represent; and
- Ellen Cargill's term had now ended creating a vacancy for a Small Primary School representative.

Members would be updated regarding the vacancies at the next Schools Forum meeting.

SCF4 DSG OUTTURN 2013-14

The Forum received the final Dedicated Schools Grant position for 2013-14 and was asked to note the amount of DSG carried forward into the 2014-15 financial year.

Members were advised therefore that the amount of unspent DSG from 2013-14 was £3,836,237, and this would be carried forward into the 2014-15 financial year.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum note that the amount of unspent DSG from 2013-14 being carried forward to 2014-15 is £3,836,237.

SCF5 CONTINGENCY UPDATE

The Forum was presented with an update on the value of the Dedicated School Grant contingencies for 2014-15.

The following was reported for each of the contingencies:

The General Schools Contingency – for 2014-15 was £351,454. A licenced deficit for Farnworth Primary School for £9,541 had been agreed, leaving a revised total of £341,913.

Pupil Growth Contingency – This was £180,000 for 2014-15.

High Needs Contingency – This was £1,226,420 for 2014-15. The carry forward balance for 2013-14 was £2,120,856, giving a total budget of £3,347,276. Funding had already been approved and allocated to Ashley School for Post-16 development, £110,000 and Post-16 High Needs Assessment £14,000. Funding of approximately £108,050 would be allocated to Cavendish for place funding error. The remaining balance of this contingency is £3,115,221.

Early Years Contingency – This was £730 for 2014-15. There was a carry forward budget of £821,813. After the deduction of the Early Years Enhanced budget of £80,000 and the support to Ditton Nursery of £54,427 the remaining balance was £688,116.

Central Contingency – The total carry forward from 2013-14 was £1,170,059. After deduction of the additional rates costs for The Grange of £170,580, additional rates cost for All Saints Upton of £33,378, The Grange redundancy costs of £117,010 and the EAL Provision of £146,828, there was a remaining balance of £702,254.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum notes the balances on each of the contingencies.

SCF6 PROTOCOL FOR CONSIDERING REQUESTS FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Forum received a report which set out the criteria for applications for financial assistance and the procedure to be followed.

Members were advised that the General Schools Contingency was the sum delegated to schools. Halton schools had agreed that this sum be de-delegated and managed centrally. The present budget was £351,454. It was noted that the carry forward balance from the Central DSG budgets had also been used to support requests for additional assistance by schools.

The Forum was advised that the funding should only be used in the following circumstances:

- Exceptional unforeseen costs which it would be unreasonable to expect governing bodies to meet;
- Schools in financial difficulties; and
- Additional costs relating to new, reorganised or closing schools.

Further, applications could be considered by Schools Forum under the following circumstances:

1. Schools in financial difficulty that wished to apply for a licenced deficit (*the procedure for applying for a licenced deficit was attached to the report at Appendix A*);
2. Schools in financial difficulty, unable to access a licence deficit, applying for a deficit write off;
3. Formula error and other miscellaneous costs which schools could not be expected to fund from their own budget;
4. Additional costs relating to new, re-organised or closing schools (which could include the costs of any salary protection);
5. Emergencies and exceptional unforeseen costs where it would be unreasonable to expect governing bodies to meet;
6. Schools in special measures or where there were serious weaknesses;
7. Result of former poor leadership and management for a school which was now under new leadership; and
8. Significant loss of goods or equipment.

The report then advised that the procedure for applying for additional funding from the contingency was:

1. Schools must put a formal request for support in writing to the Operational Director – Children's Organisation and Provision, Children and Enterprise Directorate;
2. Schools must state clearly how they had met the eligibility criteria;
3. Schools must provide clear details (and financial values) of the circumstances underlying the application, the amount of contingency they were applying for and the rationale for the amount requested;
4. Applications could be made at any time during the year;
5. Urgent requests would be considered and determined by a sub group of the Schools Forum, the outcome would be reported to the next Schools Forum meeting;
6. The Headteacher of the school applying for funding may be asked to attend Schools Forum to explain their application and answer any queries;
7. Schools would be notified of the outcome of the Schools Forum decision within 5 working days of the meeting.

Members discussed the procedures for applying for funding mentioned above and suggested that more background information should be submitted with an application, to assist the Forum to make a decision. Specific details around evidence of the need for supply teachers and best value evidence were given as examples. It was also suggested that a pro forma / check list be compiled so that it could be referred to by the Forum when making a decision.

The importance of using sub groups for determining financial assistance requests was also discussed. It was noted that due to the timing of requests, it was not always possible to wait for the next Schools Forum meeting, so therefore a sub group, made up of volunteers, would be required. It was agreed that a sub group should be no less than 3 members of the Schools Forum and no more than 5 members. The sub group would also require delegated powers to make a decision on behalf of the Schools Forum. This was noted and agreed by members.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

1. approve the proposed criteria for funding assistance;
2. agree to adopt the proposed procedures; and
3. agree to the introduction of a pro-forma/checklist to accompany applications for financial assistance.

SCF7 UPDATE ON REQUESTS FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ann McIntyre presented the Forum with a business case for financial support for uniform at Fairfield Primary School.

A copy of the business case was circulated to members for consideration which explained that an amount of £13,114 was needed towards the cost of the new school uniform since the merging of the Junior and Infant Schools, which was an initiative of the Local Authority.

Members discussed the request and voted to approve the request and to include the costs that would be incurred for Reception as well.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum approves the request for financial assistance from Fairfield Primary School.

SCF8 FAIR FUNDING CONFERENCE UPDATE

Anne Jones provided members with an update on the

information obtained following the Fair Funding Conference on 4 June 2014.

The following highlights were made:

- Early Years Pupil Premium was announced at £50m for 2015-16 for disadvantaged 3 and 4 year olds;
- There would be a consultation on savings of £200m (20%) of the Education Services Grant for 2015-16 and the impact this would have on key services;
- Consideration was given on how a NFFF could be introduced for 2015-16;
- Noted that pupil numbers were increasing which would be challenging for the next Government in itself but also the number and proportion of pupil with complex education needs would also rise;
- The EFA intend to announce final school block units of funding in the summer to enable local authorities to start consulting their schools before the summer holiday;
- The EFA could provide pupil referral units and alternative provision academies with greater stability by increasing their place funding from £8k to £10k;

RESOLVED: That the information be noted.

SCF9 SCHOOL BALANCES

The Forum received a report which advised them of the level of balances brought forward from 2013-14 by Halton Schools. Attached to the report at Appendix A were the individual schools budget balances with comparisons to 2012-13. Appendix B detailed the Non-LMS balances brought forward into 2014-15.

Members were reminded that following discussion at the Schools Forum meeting in January 2013, the excess surplus balance limits previously imposed on schools were lifted for 2012-13 and had continued for 2013-14, on the understanding however that the balances were still to be monitored.

The Forum was advised that the level of balances in the individual Schools Budget held by Halton Schools brought forward into 2014-15 was £7,331,527. This was an increase of £161,477 to the balance carried forward into 2013-14 of £7,170,050.

A total of £356,575 non-LMS funds were carried forward into 2013-14 by schools. This balance had reduced

by £99,728 to give a balance of £263,181 to be carried forward into 2014-15.

Members noted that the balances for Fairfield and Cavendish only reflected a 9 month period not a 12 month period which had distorted the figures. The balance limit for academies at 12% would be confirmed as this was an estimate. Members also noted that there were a couple of schools with a deficit balance and should be approached as to why.

RESOLVED: That

1. the report be noted; and
2. the Forum requests that the schools showing a deficit be contacted for further information.

Anne Jones

SCF10 UNIVERSAL INFANT FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Further to the announcement last autumn that the Government was extending the eligibility to Free School Meals to include all infant pupils, an update on the new Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) grant for 2014-15 was provided to the Forum.

Members were advised that the conditions of grant paper from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) had been received together with the UIFSM calculator, which would allow staff to estimate the grant each school may receive for the academic year 2014-15.

The report provided information on:

- The provisional and final allocations;
- Dual Registered Pupils;
- Small Schools;
- Recovery of Overpayment;
- Grant Estimates;
- Grant Funding;
- Grant Carry Forward;
- Pupil Premium/Formula Deprivation Funding; and
- The Conditions of Grant document (attached to the report).

Members raised concerns over the entitlement to FSM and that the application procedure was not made clear to parents. It was noted that a schools' Pupil Premium Funding could be affected if parents do not sign up for FSM when they are entitled to them.

Also, clarification was needed with regards to the auto enrolment from those claiming housing benefit and the need to complete the form requesting FSM.

It was agreed that Ann McIntyre would make contact with the relevant officers in this regard and would convey responses to the Schools Forum.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

SCF11 EARLY YEARS FUNDING

Anne Jones advised the amount of £730 would be added to the contingency of £90,000.

RESOLVED: That the information be noted.

SCF12 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

The schedule of Schools Forum meeting dates was attached and it was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 16 October 2014 at 4pm in the Civic Suite, Runcorn Town Hall.

Meeting ended at 5.48 p.m.