

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 16 June 2021 held remotely

Present: Councillor T. McInerney (Observer)
A. Jones, Democratic Services, HBC
A. McIntyre, Education, Inclusion & Provision, HBC
N Shafiq, Financial Management, HBC
K. Landrum, (Chair) Primary School with a Nursery Representative
A. Brown, Nursery Schools Representative
J. O'Connor, PVI Representative
J. Coughlan, Primary Representative - Infant School
N. Hunt, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
A. Sheppard, VA Schools Representative
J. McConville, Secondary Academy Representative
I. Critchley, All Through Schools Representative (part)
L. Roberts, Small Primary Representative
C. Dalton, Secondary Academies Representative
S. Ainsworth, Special Academy Representative (Sub)

Action

SCF1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Thalia Bell, Heather Austin, Anne Simmons and Elaine Haver (who had sent named substitute Sara Ainsworth).

SCF2 MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting held on 24 February 2021, were agreed as a correct record.

SCF3 SCHOOL BALANCES 2020/21

The Forum received a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which presented the level of funding brought forward from 2020-21 by Halton's maintained schools.

It was noted that whilst balances were still reported to the Schools Forum, no excess surplus balance limits were in place. However, the Forum retained the right to require schools to provide further information as to how their balance would be spent, should they so decide.

The Individual School Budget balances for Halton maintained schools at the end of 2020-21 was £7,147.819. This was an increase of £2,601,375, compared to the balances for 2019-20. The report provided a breakdown of where the increased balances lay. There were also 5

schools with a decreased balance and two schools with a deficit balance. Members were advised that schools had had to put their plans for development on hold due to Covid.

Members were referred to Appendix A, which showed the balances for each maintained school along with their 2019-20 balance for comparison. Appendix B showed the devolved formula capital grant year-end balances for 2020-21 along with their 2019-20 balance for comparison.

Officers advised that the information in the report covered maintained schools only, there was no information for the academies balances. It was noted that they worked to a different financial year based on the academic year.

RESOLVED: That the schools balances for 2020-21 be noted.

SCF4 DSG OUTTURN 2020/21

The Forum received the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Outturn for 2020-21.

It was reported that the final amount of DSG allocated to Halton for 2020-21 was £122,099,358, which was split as follows:

Schools Block	£92,581,025
High Needs Block	£19,004,582
Early years Block	£9,848,301
Central School Services Block	£665,450

The report provided commentary for each of these Blocks and a breakdown of the 2020-21 outturn position was shown at Appendix A.

The Forum noted that with this year's overspend and carry forward balance from the previous financial year, the total deficit balance of DSG was £995,742 and this would be carried forward into 2021-22.

The ongoing challenges being faced with the High Needs budget were discussed; it was noted that this was also a national problem and although the deficit in Halton was a cause for concern, there was less of a deficit than other local areas. Ongoing demand for out of Borough placements, more complex needs of children and young people, shortages of local provision and overall increases in demand were all contributory factors to the overspend on the High Needs budget.

RESOLVED: That the Schools Forum notes that the deficit balance of DSG from 2020-21, of £995,742 will be carried forward to 2021-22.

SCF5 OUTREACH PROVISION - THE BRIDGE SCHOOL

The Forum received a report from the Headteacher of The Bridge School, on the funding requirements for The Bridge School SEMH Outreach and Reintegration Service.

In February 2020 Schools Forum agreed to release £100k to support the start-up of The Bridge School Outreach Service (now SEMH Outreach and Reintegration Service) and the employment of three staff to cover roles within the service.

The report outlined the purpose of the service and the KPI's within the agreement. A copy of the Service Level Agreement and 2020-21 KPI headlines were appended to the report for information. The Bridge School requested an additional £25k to cover the actual staffing costs and to provide sufficient funds for resourcing work and meeting staff training needs.

The Service had been running for a year now and although the data was not yet ready, it was clear it was making a difference as exclusion rates alone had dramatically dropped when compared with the year before. This 'invest to save' model would prevent huge amounts being spent outside the Borough and it addressed children's needs promptly and appropriately.

The additional £25k was requested as the initial amount allocated for the grading of the lead teacher was too low; this and subsequent on costs had increased the costs overall.

RESOLVED: That the Schools Forum

- 1) notes the report; and
- 2) approves the request for an additional £25k contribution to The Bridge School Outreach and Reintegration Service.

SCF6 DSG MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Forum received a report which summarised the requirement on the Local Authority to produce and consult on a DSG Management Plan.

It was reported that there was a requirement for the Local Authority to share the Management Plan with local stakeholders; this included the Schools Forum. The Department for Education (DfE) has produced guidance and a management plan template; this was appended to the report.

The focus of the Plan for Halton would be on the high needs provision and spend and it was expected that the plan would be updated and presented to Schools Forum at each of its meetings. Work had commenced on completing the detailed template, which would be completed before the end of term and then shared with the Forum and other appropriate stakeholders. It was agreed that following this the Forum could decide on whether an additional meeting was needed to consider the Plan; if not then the item would be placed on the October agenda.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum members note the requirement for a DSG Management Plan and agree to calling an additional meeting to consider the completed template, if required.

On behalf of the Forum the Chair wished to congratulate Ann McIntyre on the announcement of her retirement. He thanked her for all the years loyal service to the Local Authority and for the support offered to all schools over the years – she would be greatly missed.

Meeting ended at 4.45 p.m.