

THE CUMBRIAN SCHOOLS' FORUM

Draft MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

13 January 2021

via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT

Lisa Balderstone (PRU)

Alison Claricoats (North Maintained Primary)

Jane Faulkner (PVI)

Stephen Gilby (North Maintained Secondary)

Matthew Hardwick (South Maintained Secondary)

Steven Holmes (South Secondary Academy)

James Jackson (West Secondary Academy)

Matthew Jessop (South Maintained Primary)

Simon Lahaney (FEC)

Chris McAree (North Secondary Academy)

John McAuley (RC Diocese)

Amanda McDonald (Nursery Schools)

David Nattrass (North Maintained Primary)

Jennifer Rowlands (West Secondary – representing Judith Schafer)

Alan Rutter (Teachers Professional Associations and Chair of Forum)

Sue Sanderson (Cabinet Member – Schools and Learning)

Cathy Styles (South Maintained Primary)

Charlotte Tudway (CE Diocese)

Ruth Webster (South Maintained Primary)

Kris Williams (North Secondary Academy)

Officers in Attendance:

Dan Barton (AD – Education and Skills)

Dale Hill (School Improvement)

Marie Barnes (School Improvement)

Susan Milburn (Group Finance Manager)

Amanda Chew (Finance Manager)

Nicola Shiels (Forum Support)

Observers:

Apologies for Absence

Richard Aindow (Special Academies)

Louise Donnelly-Stott (Small Schools)

Daniel Hinton (Special Schools)

Vanessa O'Dea (CE Diocese)

Judith Schafer (West Secondary – represented by Jennifer Rowlands)

PART 1: ITEMS LIKELY TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

1. Exclusion of Press and Public

It was agreed that all items would be considered in the public domain.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at this stage.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting of the Schools Forum held on 27 November 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. Dedicated Schools Grant Budget 2021-22

The Schools Forum considered a report that informs them of the 2021-22 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget. The total Dedicated Schools Grant budget to be allocated in 2021-22 was £412.667m. This was to fund all schools (both maintained and academies), and also covered both early years (including PVI providers) and high needs provision.

The DSG Settlement for 2021-22 was £412.667m this represented an increase of £29.346m compared to 2020-21 and included the roll in of the former Teacher Pay and Pension Grants (TPG and TPECG).

The Early Years Block allocation was £28.066m, an increase of £0.387m and included an additional £0.06 per 3-4 year old and £0.08 per 2 year old in free entitlement funding. It was proposed that this would be passed onto providers. The TPG and TPECG had not been rolled into the Early Years Block – this will continue to be funded separately.

The Schools Block allocation was £302.212m, an increase of £24.059m this included the roll in of the TPG and TPECG of £14.582m. After applying the NFF in full a balance of £2.311m was remaining. As recommended by Schools Forum and agreed by Cabinet any balance remaining up to a maximum of 0.5% after allocating the NFF could be transferred to the HN Block. 0.5% represented £1.558m of the Schools Block; this excluded the roll in of TPG and TPECG which was protected. Therefore, after taking into account the 0.5% transfer there was a remaining balance of £0.753m. There were restrictions on the Schools Block however LAs, with the approval of SF, could have a Growth Fund budget. Last year the Schools Forum approved a Growth budget of £0.713m – this year it was proposed that the Growth budget should be reduced to £0.200m therefore allowing £0.553m additional funding to be allocated to schools by increasing the AWPU rates.

The Central Schools Service Block (CSSB) allocation was £4.184m, a reduction of (£0.236m) and included £0.193m for the roll in of TPG and TPECG which was protected. The block consisted of 2 elements – historic commitments and ongoing commitments. Since 2020-21 the DfE had reduced the historic commitments element by 20% each year. Historic commitments fund CCC services supporting schools, capital maintenance and prudential borrowing. This year, following a review of service budgets supported by the Central Schools Services Block the shortfall against historic

commitments budget was (£0.427m). It was proposed that the capital maintenance budget was reduced by this amount and as per last year, alternative funding to support the shortfall would be considered by Cabinet when finalising the Council's budget.

The High Needs Block allocation was £53.759m, an increase of £5.136m. This was before recoupment for HN places in academies and FE colleges which was provisionally £4.208m. The budget available for HN after taking into account recoupment and adding in the £1.558m transfer from Schools block was £51.109m. The current HN deficit recovery plan, which already anticipated the increase in funding, predicted that the deficit on HN Block at the end of 2020-21 would be £15.190m rising to £17.432m in 2021-22 but after taking into account the School Block transfer of £1.558m the predicted deficit for 2021-22 was reduced to £15.874m.

Schools Forum noted:

- i) the Dedicated Schools Grant budget for 2021-22;
- ii) the proposed increases in the basic hourly rates for 2 and 3-4 year olds;
- iii) the proposed allocation of the Schools Block and 0.5% transfer to High Needs Block; and
- iv) the reduction against the Central School Services Budget.

Schools Forum approved:

- v) the centrally retained Early Years expenditure budget of £0.575m;
- vi) the Central Schools Services Block budget of £4.184m; and
- vii) the Growth Fund budget of £0.200m.

5. High Needs Block – Budget Monitoring as at Quarter 2 2020-21

A report was presented that provided an update on the forecast deficit on the High Needs (HN) block as at 30 September 2020 which was forecast to rise compared to the closing deficit at the end of the financial year 2019-20.

A balanced High Needs budget had been set for 2020-21 with no planned transfer to reserves. As reported to Schools Forum at its meeting held on 17 January 2020 the original budget available for the HN Block was £45.894m. As at Q1 the projected High Needs Block in-year pressure was reported as £4.169m.

Since the initial budget was set for 2020-21 the funding available through the HN Block from central government had increased to take into account updated DfE recoupment deductions for pre and post-16 HN places in academies, further education colleges and the free special school, and updated import/export adjustment for pupils with HN who lie outside the local authority attending schools in Cumbria and those who lie in Cumbria but attend schools outside of this local authority.

Performance against the High Needs Block budget was monitored on a monthly basis with reports presented to senior management each month, and to Cabinet on a quarterly basis, as well as to each Schools Forum meeting. The projection against the budget as at Q2 showed that the budget was projected to overspend by £4.109m at 31 March 2021 with a projected deficit of £15.131m.

The main in-year pressures related to the EHCP top-up payments, the cost of independent placements, top-ups for post 16, residential placements and invest to save initiatives.

The Invest to Save Initiatives earmarked reserve was held within the DSG reserves and was made up of underspends carried forward from 2018-19 and 2019-20. Commitments in 2020-21 included the Sandgate Early Intervention Programme and Greengate Junior Alternative Provision in Schools and the continuation of other invest to save initiatives agreed in 2018-19 and 2019-20.

The projected forecast expenditure in 2020-21 would be funded from the Invest to Save reserves and from the additional HN block funding made available in 2020-21.

The forecast expenditure as at Q” exceeded the savings achieved in the same period. As previously reported, the anticipated savings for the some of the invest to save initiatives were not immediate but were expected to have an impact in future years. For example, the Sandgate early intervention project and the 2 new AP centres in the North and South of the County were expected to increase the number of children that were able to remain in mainstream education and reduce the number of pupils being permanently excluded resulting in a reduction in the use of high cost independent sector placements and other alternative education arrangements.

The number of children with EHCPs had risen continuously each month for some time; between April 2018 and September 2020 numbers had increased by 920 or 31%. Some further analysis of numbers and trends were set out in the report.

It remained the case that a significant proportion of the HN Block funding from central government was still based on historic spend using 2017-18 planned HN Block expenditure as a baseline. For 2020-21, 40% of the total allocation was allocated through the historic spend factor meaning that the formula used to calculate the HN Block funding for 2020-21 did not fully recognise the continued growth in demand for specialist places that had been experienced at local and national level. As well as that, it did not adequately recognise the significant additional investment required to increase the in-house capacity for specialist places resulting in pupils being placed in expensive independent settings. In recognition of this, the DfE have provided additional HN funding in 2019-20 and 2020-21, however, it still does not recognise the year on year growth in demand for SEND services which first started following the Children and Families Act 2014 SEND reforms. It is also expected that the impact of school closures and lockdown due to COVID19 will result in a spike in the number of pupils requiring additional SEND support when returning to school.

The Schools Forum noted the report and the current projection as at 30 September 2020.

6. Schools De-delegated Contingency Budget – Budget Monitoring Quarter 2

A report presenting the forecast outturn position on the de-delegated contingency budget for the 2020-21 financial year as at 30 September 2020 was presented. The budget was currently projected to overspend by £0.459m and in accordance with the Dedicated Schools Grant conditions, the overspend on the de-delegated contingencies budget as at 31 March 2021 would be carried forward into the Dedicated Schools Grant earmarked reserve.

As this was a de-delegated budget it therefore only related to maintained schools and not academies.

The de-delegated contingency budget for 2020-21 was £0.678m. DfE guidance stated that the contingency budget could be used for three purposes:

- Circumstances which were unforeseen when the school's budget share was initially determined.
- Schools in financial difficulties
- Additional costs relating to new, reorganised or closing schools

Circumstances which were unforeseen when the school's budget share was initially determined.

The main areas of expenditure were ill health retirements, settlement agreements in schools in line with the agreed policy, administration costs of the Teachers Annual Return and other miscellaneous costs including school rates bill adjustments and temporary accommodation at the Gillford Centre PRU.

Additional costs relating to new, closing or amalgamated schools

Two schools, Caldew Lea and Hensingham Primary, had received academy orders to become sponsored academies during 2019-20. The final accounts for these academies had been agreed and had resulted in an additional £0.049m chargeable to the contingency fund.

Two schools had closed on 31 August 2020 (Bram Longstaffe Nursery School and Newtown Primary School which became a sponsored academy). The combined deficit for these two schools was estimated to be £0.588m.

The Schools Forum noted the forecast outturn position on the contingencies budget for 2020-21.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Schools Forum would be held on Thursday, 11 March 2021. The meeting would be held via Microsoft Teams. Arrangements and start time would be advised prior to the meeting. It was noted that the revised legislation that was introduced to enable Schools Forum to meet virtually during Covid would end on 31 March 2021.

8. Any Other Business

The Chair thanked members for attending. There were no other items of business.

SAA/NS
March 2021