

SCHOOLS FORUM

20 October 2015

Commenced:	1.30pm	Terminated:	3.30pm
Present:	Janet Rathburn (Chair)	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Lisa Gallaher	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Scott Lees	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Bev Allford	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Karen Burns	Primary Schools - Academies	
	Anthony McDermott	Governor, Primary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Susan Marsh	Governor, Primary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Pam Hirst	Governor, Primary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Eamonn Murphy	Secondary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Richard O'Regan	Secondary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Janet Burns	Secondary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Brendan Hesketh	Secondary Schools - Academies	
	Linda Lester	Special Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Jeffrey Mellor	Governor, Special Schools - Academies	
	Ann Slater	NASUWT	
	Elaine Horridge	Diocesan representative	
	Heather Loveridge	Assistant Executive Director – Learning	
	Catherine Moseley	Head of Access & Inclusion	
	Stephen Wilde	Head of Resource Management	
	David Thompstone	Senior Resource Manager	
Apologies for absence:			
	Elizabeth Jones	Governor, Secondary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Des Howlett	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Janet Nevin	14 – 19 Sector	
	Matt Jennings	Secondary Schools – Academies	
	Robin Elm	Special Schools – L/A Maintained	
	Helen Hayes	Diocesan representative	
	Elaine Todd	Assistant Executive Director – Asset & Investment Partnership Management, Economic Growth, Investment & Sustainability	

25. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 7 July 2015, having been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

26. CONFIRMED SCHOOL BALANCES 2014/5

Consideration was given to a report of the Assistant Executive Director of Finance (section 151 Officer) giving information on the reconciled school balances at 31 March 2015.

The final level of school balances as at 31 March 2015 was £8,789 million, a decrease of £2,792 million on the balance reported at 31 March 2014.

Summary details were also provided of the cumulative level of Tameside school balances for the previous three financial years.

The Head of Resource Management reported that over the next three years some schools would be projecting deficit budget levels. Meetings had taken place with those schools with balances in excess of twice the permitted threshold but these schools have since had building work undertaken over the summer and the monies were now spent. He reported on those schools with excess balances and the variety of proposals put forward by the schools for spending the excess. Furthermore if schools had not spent the excess money by the end of the financial year, the Council would hold the monies until spent. One suggestion put forward by schools was that the Council provide details of recovery plans, which would enable schools to reduce their balances within reasonable times. Concerns were expressed that those schools with planned capital schemes may choose to defer these in view of impending budget cuts and a discussion ensued.

It was confirmed that the Council was in the process of putting together financial plans with proposals, which will be put forward to schools.

AGREED

- (i) That the content of the report be noted; and**
- (ii) That the existing excess revenue surplus balance monitoring mechanism for schools within the Borough from 1 April 2014 be continued, i.e. planned commitments are required for revenue surplus balances in excess of 8% of delegated revenue budget for Primary and Special schools and 5% of delegated revenue budget for Secondary schools. Commitment details are to be reported to the Schools Forum which will have the opportunity to consider a redistribution mechanism for any uncommitted revenue balances above permitted thresholds.**

27. COUNCIL MANAGED DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT MONITORING STATEMENT – QUARTER 2

Consideration was given to a report of the Assistant Executive Director of Finance (section 151 Officer), which detailed the centrally managed Dedicated Schools Grant for 2015/16.

The report detailed the financial monitoring position for 2015/16 at the end of September 2015 for the Council Services as listed in Appendix A, the Centrally Managed High Needs services and the Early Years funding that was delegated to Private, Voluntary and Independent Providers.

AGREED

- (i) That the content of the report be noted; and**
- (ii) Members support the proposal to change the charging mechanism for the contribution towards the Local Safeguarding Children Board, to one which was based on pupil numbers at each school.**

28. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report of the Assistant Executive Director, Finance (Section 151 Officer) which informed members of the arrangements concerning the Dedicated Schools Grant..

It was reported that the Schools Block was the largest element of DSG funding, which provided the majority of funding for Mainstream School, with additional elements potentially being allocated to Mainstream Schools through the Early Years and High Needs blocks. The Department for Education (DfE) carried out a “Fairer Schools Funding 2015/16” consultation in relation to proposed changes to the Schools Block element of the DSG earlier this year. As a result of the responses they received to the consultation the DfE agreed to some minor changes to their original proposals, but no significant changes were made to them.

Over the last three years the DfE had consistently stated that School funding was unfairly allocated. They believed that Schools with similar characteristics in different Local Authority areas were allocated substantially different levels of funding as a result of historic funding allocations. The DfE used data provided by each Local Authority in relation to the unit rates used in 2013/14 in their respective local funding formulae to arrive at minimum levels of funding for each Local Authority. These Minimum Funding Levels (MFL) per pupil also included a hybrid area cost adjustment which was intended to reflect prevailing market rates.

It was reported that under the new formulae, Tameside would not receive any additional DSG Schools Block funding in 2015/16 or 2016/17 through the MFL. No indication had been given by the DfE of whether the 2017/18 Schools Block allocation would be based on MFL rates, but if it was fully implemented by the DfE without any protection there would be an estimated reduction of £5.264m, which equated to 3.52% of the current allocation.

Due to the scale of potential reduction in funding from 2017/18 onwards it was considered prudent to provide Schools/Academies with estimates of the worst case budgets that could arise from full implementation of the MFL. During March 2016 the Council would issue funding estimates for 2017/18 based on both the DfE's new MFL proposal and on the basis of the current local funding scheme.

It was explained that a separate report being considered later on the agenda described the projected increased costs in the Post 16 High Needs placements area of £552,067 in 2015/16. This was due to a combination of a volume of students accessing the provision and the DfE funding regulation making it easier for providers in this sector to dictate the cost of placements. Urgent discussions were taking place with the main provider to try to reduce these costs.

Reference was made to the High Needs Pre 16 Block and how the DfE funding regime allocated funding to Special Schools. The first was a standard Top-up rate per School used for those schools whose children had very similar needs. The second method used in Tameside involved placing each child in a Top-up banding based on their assessed needs, which meant Schools had children in different Top-up bandings.

The report detailed work that was due to take place reviewing how comparable the Top-up bandings were across the North West Councils and trying to ensure that any comparisons were as accurate as possible, as there would be variations in the criteria used for each Council's Top-up bandings. The increasing number of children in the Pre-16 Special School sector meant that there was insufficient funding to support the Pre-16 places in 2016/17. This was primarily because the amount of DSG funding allocated by the DfE per child above nursery age in Tameside was £4,709.91 but the average total placement cost per child in Tameside was closer to £21,596 so every additional child with High Needs created considerable additional funding challenges.

AGREED

That the content of the report be noted.

29. TRADED AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO SCHOOLS 2016/17

The Assistant Executive Director, Learning submitted a report, which updated Members on the delivery of traded and support services to schools and proposed that the existing arrangements continued for a further year after April 2016 to enable the Local Authority to determine how those services could best be delivered in the future.

Following consultation with Head teachers and the Schools Forum last year, it was agreed that all traded services would be procured on the basis of a two year commitment to enable both school and the Council to plan with greater certainty. The uptake from schools had continued to be high.

As part of the Local Authority's commitment to school, quality assurance processes had also been put in place to monitor the delivery of services. A Head teacher Panel was convened in May 2015 at which all service managers attended to receive feedback and provided responses to issues which were raised. Schools now needed to consider which services they would want to procure for 2016/17 based on the offer the Council put forward.

It was pointed out that it had become apparent that there were demands on certain services that exceeded the cost recovery, e.g. HR support for schools where some school leaders required additional support, or where there were particularly complex cases requiring additional support beyond the normal expectations. These would need to be reviewed.

A discussion ensued and Members sought and were given assurances from the Council that the quality of services would be maintained.

Members asked that De-delegation be put on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting of the Forum.

Members stated that they could not make a definitive decision about services for December 2015 without canvassing their colleagues and asked for more time. They were informed that they would need to provide a definitive decision by the time of the meeting of the Forum in February 2016.

AGREED

(i) **That for the financial year 2016/17, the Council continued to offer the services listed in Appendix A, with the proviso that:**

- **HR Support Services were packaged to reflect a more realistic cost of time required on case work;**
- **Education Welfare and Educational Psychology Support Services reviewed their capacity to deliver support over above their statutory functions;**
- **The cost of all remaining Council Services delivered to schools was reviewed and prices updated where appropriate; and**
- **An appropriate level of inflation was applied to those services where existing prices reflected the actual cost of service delivery.**

30. EDUCATION SUMMIT JULY 2015

A report was submitted by the Assistant Executive Director, Learning, which provided Members with feedback on the purpose and outcomes of the Tameside Education Summit held in July 2015. There were some very clear messages which emerged from national speakers that set the scene for schools working together and supporting each other.

There was no doubt that strategic approaches involving schools working together enabled many issues such as succession planning, subject networks and school to school support to be addressed more effectively. The clear messages from the Summit was that change in the education system needed to be driven by the profession and the role of the local authority was to initiate and help lead that drive for change. The Council needed to secure a long term and sustained commitment from schools to work together and move from a position of 'my school' to 'our schools'.

The work that was being developed with the Summit Task Group represented the first stages in developing a vision for education that looked forward to the next two to three years and focused on some particular issues in relation to Transition, Assessment without Levels and Behaviour – the themes of the workshops.

AGREED

That the contents of the report and action plan be noted.

31. PRIMARY CATERING UPDATE

The Assistant Executive Director, Finance (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report, which updated Members on the cost of the Council Managed Catering Service in 2015/16.

The report detailed the catering service charging mechanism and costs for Schools accessing the Council Managed Catering Service.

Discussion ensued and Members sought clarification about how much notice was required if Schools opted out of the contract to go with a different service provider and about the tendering process as they felt that there were other cheaper options available outside of the Authority.

Members were advised that the catering costs also included utilisation of kitchen equipment and Schools would need to be provided with clarity about what costs they would be responsible for if they took their services to a third party provider.

Members requested that a report on this urgent piece of work be provided as soon as possible and sought a meeting with the Executive Director, Place, regarding clarity on school meals.

AGREED

- (i) That the content of the report be noted; and**
- (ii) That Members support in principle the allocation of DSG Contingency to the small number of Schools who would need to fund an increase in the net cost of the Catering Service in 2015/16. The actual cost of this DSG Contingency allocation was expected to be less than £25,000.**

32. NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the Forum would meet on Tuesday 8 December 2015 commencing at 1.30pm.