

SCHOOLS' FORUM

28 November 2023

Commenced: 10.00am

Terminated: 11.00am

Present:	Karen Burns (Chair)	Primary Schools – Academies
	Susan Marsh	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Kirsty Rimmer	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Lisa Lockett	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Lisa Gallaher	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	John Cooper	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Simon Brereton	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Gemma Patterson	Primary Schools - Academies
	Bev Oldham	Primary Schools - Academies
	Joanne Lennon	Primary Schools - Academies
	Heather Farrell	Primary Schools - Academies
	Andrea Din	Secondary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Anthony Benedict	Pupil Referral Service
	Anne Morgan	Tameside Teachers' Consultative Committee
	Rebecca Woollam	Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent
	Lisa Richards	16-19 Sector
	Elaine Horridge	Church of England Diocese
	Jerome Francis	Finance Business Partner
	Louisa Siddall	Senior Finance Manager
	Wendy Lees	Finance Manager
	Jane Sowerby	Assistant Director, Education

Apologies for absence:	Councillor North	Executive Member
	Councillor Feeley	Executive Member
	David Waugh	Secondary Schools - Academies

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members of Schools' Forum.

18 MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting of the School's Forum, which was held on 26 September 2023.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of Schools' Forum, which was held on 26 September 2023, be approved as a correct record

19 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) MONITORING UPDATE 2023-24

Consideration was given to a report of the Interim Assistant Director of Finance and Assistant Director of Education, which provided an update on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget position for the financial year 2023-24.

Members were made aware that there was a forecast surplus of £0.010m on the Schools Block, which related to unallocated growth. However, it was noted that this was based on October census 2023 data and figures would be updated once this was finalised. It was further noted that any surplus on the Schools Block would be used to reduce the DSG deficit and that the Central School Services Support Block was expected to be spent in full.

Members acknowledged that the High Needs Block continued to be under significant pressure and it was explained that there was a forecast in-year deficit of £5.913m on the High Needs Block. However, this reduced to £5.219m following the £0.694m transfer from the Schools Block. This represented a favourable movement of £0.657m from the forecast in September 2023. It was further noted that September and October had seen a low number of Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) being issued, However, the overall number of plans forecast to be issued during the financial year was an average of 45 plans per month.

Members were made aware that there may be further expenditure on the High Needs Block in relation to the education costs relating to Children's Social Care (CSC) placements. It was noted that the DSG already funded the educational costs for a number of CSC placements but a review was underway, which would look to ensure all partner contributions, including Health, Education and Social Care were applied fairly and in accordance with the specific individual placement requirements. It was explained that this may identify additional contributions required from the High Needs Block and an estimate of £0.100m had been included at this stage. Members were made aware that, once the review was complete further information would be provided.

With regards to the Early Years Block, Members were informed that there was a forecast surplus on the Early Years Block of (£0.492m), which represented an adverse movement of £0.058m to the forecast reported in September 2023. It was noted that actual participation for the Autumn term was currently being finalised and an update on these areas of entitlement along with early years pupil premium and the disability access fund would be provided at the next Schools Forum meeting in January 2024.

Members were made aware that there was a forecast deficit of £0.126m on the SEND Inclusion Fund (SENDIF), which represented an adverse movement of £0.058m in comparison to the previously reported forecast. It was explained that approved SENDIF requests for funding were at a higher level in the first half of 2023-24 but looked to level out, with a further update to be brought to the January Schools' Forum meeting.

Members were provided with an update on the Early Years Supplementary Grant (EYSG), which would provide additional funding for early years providers. It was explained that initial allocations for the EYSG would be paid based on Part Time Equivalent (PTE) data from the January 2023 early years, schools and alternative provision censuses. It was also noted that the DfE intended to make an adjustment to reflect the actual numbers of children taking up the entitlements from the January 2024 censuses. It was noted that the allocation for Tameside was £0.989m and Members were provided with details of the breakdown of the allocation and the estimated distribution of the grant.

In relation to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), Members were informed that, if the 2023-24 projections materialise, there would be a deficit of £8.077m on the DSG reserve. Members were reminded that a Deficit Recovery Plan had been submitted to the DfE, with the plan being scrutinised as part of the Delivering Better Value programme. Members were assured that the position would continue to be closely monitored and further update would be provided.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted and supported

20 SCHOOLS BLOCK FUNDING FORMULA CONSULTATION OUTCOME 2024-25

Consideration was given to a report of the Interim Assistant Director of Finance and Assistant Director of Education, which outlined the consultation to all schools regarding the allocation of Schools Block funding for 2024-25.

An error in the original calculations for NFF by the DfE was highlighted and Members were made aware that the DfE had apologised for this error. Documentation in relation to this was shared with Members. As a result, the high level information and NFF rates presented during the last meeting had been revised.

It was explained that the provisional 2024-25 updated allocation for Tameside had increased by £6.791m, as opposed to £8.668m as originally reported. It was noted that this was after increasing the 2023-24 Schools Block allocation to take account to the mainstream schools additional grant (MSAG) funding that was allocated in 2023-24. There was also increases in funding across all blocks for Tameside MBC, which was noted as positive. However, the High Needs increase continued to be capped, which would continue to contribute to the High Needs deficit.

A detailed description of the Schools Block Finding Formula Proposals was provided for Members. It was noted that the core factors in the updated schools NFF (such as basic entitlement and the lump sum) would increase by 1.4% and the funding floor would ensure that every school would attract at least 0.5% more pupil-led funding than 2023-24.

Members were made aware that the modelled figures show schools were seeing an average increase of 4.92% across Tameside mainstream schools (excluding premises factors, business rates and PFI).

It was explained that part of the average 4.92% increase was related to the 2023-24 MASG being rolled into 2024-25 schools block baselines. Further comparisons were provided to show the average increase excluding the MSAG and the average increases show 1.43% across Tameside mainstream schools, which related to inflationary increases in comparison to 2023-24.

It was suggested that, based on the modelled allocations to schools and the 2024-25 funding announcements, it would be possible to:

- Set the MFG protection at the highest rate possible of 0.50%
- Remove the Gains Cap so no school would see their formula allocation capped
- Transfer 0.50% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.

In relation to Growth Funding, Members were made aware that this was not included in the provisional figures provided. However, it was explained that LAs must use the new NFF requirements for growth funding, whereby additional classes (driven by basic need) must be funded by at least the minimum funding level set out in the funding calculation. The NFF growth allocations had been set at £1,550 per new primary pupil and £2,320 per new secondary pupil plus a lump sum of £76,195 for each brand-new school. It was noted that the rates used in the local formulae for Tameside were already above these rates and that there was a plan to review the existing growth policy in light of the updates to NFF.

In relation to high needs pressures for 2024-25, Members were made aware that, nationally, High Needs funding was increasing by £440m or 4.3% in 2024-25 and funding allocated to Local Authorities was increasing by around 5% overall.

It was also explained that a funding floor had been set at 3% to ensure every LA received at least a 3% increase on the relevant funding elements per head compared to 2023-24 baselines. A limit on gains would also apply so the maximum increase an LA could receive would be 5% compared to 2023-24 baselines.

It was stated that Tameside had received the maximum increase possible, the capped allocation at 5%. However, without the cap, it was noted that Tameside would have received an additional £3.885m in 2024-25. Despite this additional funding, Members were informed that the impact of the cap, along with projected growth in number of EHCPs, there continued to be an increasing in-year deficit on the high needs budget position.

Members were informed that a consultation on the proposals set out for the funding formula for Schools Block 2024-25 had been circulated to all schools and Chairs of Governors. The closing date for the consultation had been 8 November 2023 and the results of the consultation was provided for Members.

The consultation advised the proposed Schools Block funding allocation for 2024-25 would be based on the NFF rates, would have an MFG of 0.5% and there would be no cap on gains based on the provisional funding allocation for the LA. It was noted that a 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs block was also affordable on this basis.

It was explained that there were only 16 responses from 2 schools in relation to the consultation, and the responses were outlined for Members.

Discussion ensued in relation to the consultation and Members discussed the lack of response from schools and Chairs of Governors. It was noted that this was disappointing and it was suggested that headteacher briefings, moving forwards, may need to be moved in order to be able to use these a vehicle to raise the profile of such consultations and ensure understanding of the issues raised. It was also suggested that schools business managers may have greater involvement and that responses could be analysed according to sector and school context to gain a clearer understanding of the responses.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted**
- (ii) That a transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block be approved**

21 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED

That the next meeting of The Schools Forum be held at Dukinfield Town Hall, Thursday 18 January 2024 at 10am.

CHAIR