

SCHOOLS FORUM

18 October 2016

Commenced: 1.30pm Terminated: 3.20pm

Present:	Janet Rathburn (Chair)	Primary Schools – Academies
	Robin Elms	Special Schools – L/A Maintained
	Lisa Gallaher	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Scott Lees	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Bev Alford	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Des Howlett	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Elizabeth Jones	Governor, Secondary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Pam Hirst	Governor, Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Susan Marsh	Governor, Primary Schools - L/A Maintained
	Elaine Horridge	Diocesan Representative
	Anne Slater	NUT
	Anton McGrath	14 – 19 Sector
	Deb Hill	Virtual School Head Teacher
	Councillor J Fitzpatrick	First Deputy (Performance & Finance)
	Councillor L Travis	Executive Member (Lifelong Learning)
	Bob Berry	Assistant Executive Director (Learning)
	David Thompstone	Senior Resource Manager
	Stephen Wilde	Head of Resource Management

Apologies for absence:

Jeffrey Mellor	Governor – Special Schools - Academies
Anthony McDermott	Governor, Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
Janet Burns	Secondary Schools – L/A Maintained
Maureen Brettell	Pupil Referral Services
Matt Jennings	Secondary Schools – Academies
Karen Burns	Primary Schools - Academies
Steve Marsland	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained

48. MINUTES

(i) The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 21 March 2016, having been circulated, were approved as a correct record subject to inclusion of Bob Berry, Assistant Executive Director (Learning) and Pam Hirst, Governor in the list of those present at the meeting.

The notes of an inquorate meeting of the Forum held on 18 July 2016, having been circulated, were received as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Bob Berry, Assistant Executive Director (Learning) in the list of apologies.

49. 2015/16 FINAL SCHOOL BALANCES

Consideration was given to a report of the Assistant Executive Director (Finance), which provided information on the reconciled school balances at 31 March 2016.

It was explained that the final level of school balances as at 31 March 2016 was £7.187 million, a decrease of £1.602 million on the balance reported at 31 March 2015. Summary details were also provided of the cumulative level of Tameside school balances for the previous three financial years.

Appendix A to the report provided a detailed breakdown of each school's balances as at 31 March 2016 and highlighted those schools with balances in excess of the permitted thresholds (8% for primary and special schools and 5% for secondary schools).

Appendix B to the report showed the movement in school balances since 31 March 2013 at an individual school level. The Head of Resource Management reported on the deficit balances for schools and the projected deficit of some schools, which was a cause for concern. Since the preparation of the report, those schools with balances in excess of permitted thresholds had been asked for their expenditure commitments and these would be reported at the next meeting.

It was reported that the number of schools with a deficit balance was increasing and any school with a projected deficit budget position would be required to submit a deficit budget recovery plan to ensure a balanced budget was delivered. It was reported that the Head of Resource Management had written to those schools to explain the recovery plan procedure utilising the latest approved three year budget plan submitted to the Council. The Forum was informed that meetings were being arranged with relevant schools to discuss the projected deficit in further detail and to provide support and guidance on options to consider ensuring balanced budgets were being delivered.

A discussion ensued about those schools that had made spending commitments but had not yet followed these through, which was considered disappointing. Concerns were also expressed that schools were not making the distinction between good financial prudence and money being spent for enrichment purposes for the children. Members enquired about how to ensure that those schools with surplus balances were spending money on the children and it was agreed that conversations would take place with the schools to ensure that the money was spent appropriately.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the content of the report be noted;**
- (ii) That the continuation of the existing excess revenue surplus balance monitoring mechanism for schools within the borough be agreed i.e. planned commitments were 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. Agreed that commitment details be reported to the Schools Forum, which would have the opportunity to consider a redistribution mechanism for any uncommitted revenue balances above permitted thresholds. That the expenditure commitment details for those schools with a surplus balance in excess of permitted thresholds at 31 March 2016 to be provided to the Resource Management Service of the Council by 21 October 2016. The associated details to be reported to the next Schools Forum meeting for consideration; and**
- (iii) That it be noted that any school which had or was projecting a deficit budget position either during or by the end of the existing three year budget period would be required to submit a deficit budget recovery plan to ensure a balanced budget was delivered. The associated recovery plan would require the approval by the Governing Body and the Section 151 Officer of the Council in accordance with sections 4.4 to 4.9 of the Tameside Scheme of Financing for Schools. The development or recovery plans with associated schools would commence during the current term to ensure they were approved by the Governing Body and Section 151 Officer of the Council during the current financial year.**

50. COUNCIL MANAGED DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT MONITORING UPDATE 2016/17

Consideration was given to a report of the Assistant Executive Director of (Finance), which detailed the centrally managed Dedicated Schools Grant for 2016/17.

The report detailed the financial monitoring position for 2016/17 at the end of September 2016 for the Council Services as listed in Appendix A to the report, the Centrally Managed High Needs

services and the Early Years funding that was delegated to Private, Voluntary and Independent Providers.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

51. COUNCIL SERVICES TO SCHOOLS FROM 2017/18

Consideration was given to a report of the Assistant Executive Director (Finance), which provided an update to Schools Forum members on the key principles of the Services to Schools delivery model from 1 April 2017, one of which would be a fixed two year rolling contract agreement.

It was reported that for both budget and human resources planning purposes, the Council needed to obtain an agreement from schools if services were required for a pre-determined duration prior to the start of the following financial year.

It was explained that Council services had reviewed their capacity to deliver additional services over and above their core statutory functions. The service now only delivered the core statutory functions and schools procured additional support via other external providers.

Concerns were expressed by members of the Forum that this information should have been sent to schools earlier to give them enough time to consider the proposals. Further concerns were expressed that when signing 2 year contracts whilst the price remained the same, many schools found that the service/provisions changed and were therefore keen that the Council provide assurances that schools would be provided with the exact services that they were buying into. Forum members were informed that Service Level Agreements would be detailed and robust so that schools knew precisely what services they would be receiving. The service delivery model detail and associated prices would be provided to schools by 30 November 2016 at the latest.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

52. FINANCING OF SCHOOL ADMISSION APPEALS

Consideration was given to a report of the Assistant Executive Director (Finance), which outlined the details of the Department for Education (DfE) proposed changes for the funding for schools admission appeals following consultation during November 2015.

Members were informed that this report had previously been presented to the Schools Forum on 18 July 2016. Since that date the Council had reimbursed all charges from prior financial years (including the current financial year) levied against Voluntary Aided school budgets.

In November 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) issued a consultation regarding the funding for schools admission appeals. The consultation outcome was published in December 2015.

It was reported that Local authorities were required to publish schemes for financing schools setting out the financial relationship between them and the schools they maintained. The scheme for financing schools guidance listed the provisions, which a local authority's scheme must, should or may include. Section 6.2 of the guidance listed the main circumstances in which a local authority could charge school budgets for agreed services and concerned maintained school only. The consultation related to proposals to extend the list to provide flexibility for funding admission appeals.

The report further detailed the proposed changes and the current arrangements for the financing of school appeals.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the Council applies to the Secretary of State (via the schools finance disapplication request form as stated in section 3.5 of the report) in advance of the 2017/2018 financial year to increase the centrally retained DSG sum stated in section 4.1. The funding increase would support the financing of school appeals for Voluntary Aided Schools should those schools require the Council to continue the administration of their associated school appeals;
- (ii) To note that in the event that the funding disapplication request is rejected by the Secretary of State, then the Council would propose to Schools Forum that from the 2017/2018 financial year, the cost of the school appeals administered on behalf of primary and secondary Voluntary Aided school was financed from the centrally retained Dedicated Schools Grant contingency budget;
- (iii) That Academy Schools continued to be invoiced via existing arrangements to recover the relevant cost where the Council was commissioned to administer their associated school appeals; and
- (iv) To note that the Council had reimbursed all charges from prior financial years (including the current financial year) levied against Voluntary Aided school budgets.

53. COUNCIL MANAGED DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT MONITORING UPDATE 2015/16

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

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

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) That agreement be given to the allocation of unspent 2015/16 funding totalling £122,887 pro rata to the original contribution made by each School for the Contingency, Trade Union Support and Equality, Multiculturalism and Access Team (EMAT) services. Secondary School members could not vote on this issue as it specifically related to Primary Schools;
- (iii) That agreement be given to the allocation of unspent 2015/16 funding from the Behaviour for Learning and Inclusion Service (BLIS) of £17,829 to support the projected shortfall in income for that service in 2016/17. Secondary School members could not vote on this issue as it specifically related to Primary Schools; and
- (iv) That the unspent 2015/16 funding relating to Schools Forum support costs of £5,000 be used to support the equivalent budget in 2016/17.

54. PUPIL PREMIUM PLUS PAYMENTS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC)

Consideration was given to a report of the Assistant Executive Director (Learning), which outlined a proposal to amend Pupil Premium Plus payment in order to increase Special Educational Needs (SEN) support for Tameside's Looked After Children (LAC).

It was explained that the current policy in Tameside was to devolve the Pupil Premium grant for current Looked After Children (LAC) fully to schools. Whilst the Council had control over this funding in accordance with the grant regulations the Virtual School Head Teacher committed to consulting with schools in advance of any changes to this policy. The current policy was that Schools received termly instalments of the grant based on the production of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) that were approved by the Virtual School Head Teacher. The annual value of the Pupil Premium grant per Looked After Child was £1,900.

The report detailed proposals which worked on the basis of there being at least 320 Tameside looked after children then reducing the Pupil Premium Plus termly payments from £633 per term to £500 per term, this would reduce total allocations to schools by approximately £127,680. It was proposed that this funding was then used to enable the Council to recruit a full time equivalent Educational Psychologist (via external associates) and a Special Educational Needs (SEN) Caseworker on a 2 year fixed term contract. The approximated cost of both posts would be £116,800 per annum and any difference between their actual cost and the reduced funding being allocated to schools could be used to target funding at specific LAC with additional needs.

The proposal would enable all schools to be able to request an Educational Psychologist assessment for a Tameside looked after child at no cost. Having a named SEN caseworker at the Council for Looked after children would allow schools to access direct advice and support in applying for Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs).

A discussion ensued and Forum members enquired about the capacity of one SEN caseworker to service the needs of all schools but it was explained that there would be an identifiable and contained workload, which could be appropriately managed.

It was agreed that this report be taken to Tameside Primaries Consortium (TPC) and Tameside Association of Secondary Headteachers (TASH) first for discussion with the results to be fed back to the Schools Forum at the next formal meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the report be submitted to Tameside Primaries Consortium and the Tameside Association of Secondary Head teachers for consultation with results of the consultation to be fed back to the Schools Forum at the next formal meeting.

55. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Senior Resource Manager informed members that a further meeting of the Forum was required at the start of January 2017. The meeting was needed in this timescale to enable Forum members to consider the proposed funding scheme for 2017/18 before it could be formally approved by the Council and submitted to the DfE by early January 2017.

RESOLVED:

To note the date of the next meetings of the Schools Forum to be arranged and circulated by email to all members.