SCHOOLS' FORUM

21 June 2022

Commenced:	**10.00am**	**Terminated: 11.25am**

Present:	Karen Burns (Chair)	Primary Schools – Academies
	Susan Marsh	Governor, 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
	Simon Brereton	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Steve Marsland	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	John Cooper	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Richard O'Regan	Secondary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Betty Jones	Governor, Secondary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Simon Wright	Primary Schools – Academies
	Andrew Foord	Headteacher, Special Schools – L/A Maintained
	Anthony Benedict	Pupil Referral Service
	Anne Morgan	Tameside Teachers' Consultative Committee
	Elaine Horridge	Diocesan Representative
	Cllr Leanne Feeley	Executive Member
	Tim Bowman	Director, Education (Tameside and Stockport)
	Wendy Lees	Finance Manager
	Christine Mullins	Finance business Partner
Apologies for absence:	Donal Townson	Governor, Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Gemma Patterson	Primary Schools – L/A Maintained
	Anton McGrath	14-19 Sector
	Heather Farrell	Primary Schools – Academies
	Iain Linsdell	Primary Schools – Academies
	Cllr Oliver Ryan	Executive Member

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members of Forum.

2 MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting of the School's Forum, held on 15 March 2022.

RESOLVED
That the minutes of the meeting of Schools' Forum, which was held on 15 March 2022, be approved as a correct record.

3 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT OUTTURN 2021-22 AND BUDGET UPDATE 2022-23

Consideration was given to a report from Director of Education (Tameside and Stockport) and the Assistant Director, Finance, which provided an update on the outturn position for 2021-22 and the budget position for the financial year 2022-23.

Members were made aware that the position for 2021-22 was an in-year overspend position and it was noted that the High Needs budget continued to be under significant pressure despite the Schools Block transfer of £0.878m. Members were informed that this was predominantly in relation to the continued growth in the number of Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) across the borough.

An underspend of £0.178m in the Schools Block was highlighted, which was related to business rates being £0.049m lower than previously estimated, along with unallocated growth of £0.128m. In addition, Members were advised that there was a small surplus on the Central Services Schools Block of £7k. This related to a reduction in Schools' Forum costs due to remote meetings and reduced expenditure on non-staffing resources within the School Admission team.

Members noted that there was a surplus of £0.153m the Early Years Block. This was in relation to £0.147m in-year surplus and £6k additional funding from the final 2020-21 Early Years allocation from DfE. It was noted that a further £0.078m was due to be received in relation to the 2021-22 financial year and the final Early Years settlement would be announced in July 2022.

It was proposed that each of the surpluses discussed would be used to contribute to the overall Dedicated Schools Grant deficit and the overspend on the High Needs Block.

In relation to the DSG budget update for 2022-23, it was forecast that there would be a surplus on the Schools Block, which was in relation to a reduction in the PFI contributions for 3 schools. Members were informed that the value of the reduction (approx. £0.26m) would have resulted in minimal increases across all schools and, due to the timing of determining this reduction and DfE statutory deadlines, this surplus funding was added to the growth fund.

It was expected that the Central Services Schools Block would be fully utilised and the in-year deficit on the high Needs Block was expected to be £4.526m, which would be reduced to £2.884m with the £0.954m transfer from the Schools Block and a combination of savings and cost avoidance totalling £0.688m identified in the Deficit Recovery Plan.

Members were informed that the Early Years Block was currently forecasting a deficit of £0.236m and were advised that this would be updated in July 2022 with an anticipated increase of £0.323m to reflect January 2022 census data.

The Dedicated Schools Grant Reserve position for 31 March 2023 was outlined for Members. It was stated that, at the end of 2021-22 there was a £3.243m deficit and the spending detailed within this report was anticipated to bring this to a £5.786m deficit by the end of this financial year in line with the forecasts.

RESOLVED
That the contents of the report be noted and supported

4 DSG HIGH NEEDS SPENDING AND DEFICIT RECOVERY PLAN UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report from Director of Education (Tameside and Stockport), which provided an update on the current DSG deficit position and an update on the Delivering Better Value programme and action plan to address spending pressures.

Members were informed that cumulative deficit for the dedicated Schools Grant at the end of 2021-22 was £3.243m. This represented an increase of £1.687m from 2020-21.

It was highlighted that the High Needs element of the grant for 2021-22 (£28.196m) along with the transfer from Schools Block (£0.878m) had provided funds of £29.073m. However, the spend of £31.046m had exceeded this allocation by £1.973m.

It was noted that despite unprecedented investment in the High Needs sector, as highlighted in the Green Paper and a range of proposed management actions, which were outlined in the report, Tameside continued to face significant deficits, both in-year and now on the overall dedicated Schools Grant. It was further explained that this was predominantly in relation to the cap on the High Needs National Funding Formula and a significant part of funding still being based on the 2017-18 baseline spend. A comparison was made between other GM authorities to illustrate this.

Growth projections in relation to the number of Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) being requested was discussed, along with the impact of Covid-19. Concern was expressed that the demand for assessment and awarding of plans had grown exponentially and, at this stage, it was difficult to ascertain whether this increased demand would be temporary.

An overview on the previously agreed actions with regard to the management plan was provided, including service reviews, resource bases, Pupil Referral Service funding model, Element 3 savings, Top-up funding, Post 16 provision and contract reviews.

It was noted that, since the management plan had been put into place, there had been some delays in moving forwards, partly due to capacity issues within the SEND team. It was stated that resources had been diverted to respond to the recent SEND inspection, the associated Written Statement of Action and additional workload, which had been as a result of the pandemic. Members were also made aware that the Council had approved additional staffing for the SEND team to support increased demand and a number of additional posts had been created.

It was explained that Tameside were now part of the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme, which aimed to build capacity and capability within the system in order to help address existing challenges and pressures in anticipation of wider SEND reforms. It was also highlighted that this would promote further partnership work with Stockport, which would allow for joint capacity and collaborative activity.

Following presentation of the report, Forum Members expressed their continued support with regard to concerns surrounding the lack of funding and the disparity between Tameside and statistical neighbours. It was noted that local Members of Parliament had previously raised this issue and that there had been correspondence with the DfE in relation to these concerns. However, it was also acknowledged that there was perhaps more that could be done with regard to escalating these issues and obtaining further support. Following some detailed discussion, it was suggested that this would continue to be considered outside of the meeting.

It was noted that, in terms of realising potential savings, there was still more work that could be done and it was acknowledged that the system needed to be provision led rather than needs led. It was emphasised that the high number of requests for statutory assessments was of significant concern. As a result, it was felt that a strong focus was required on effective use of the graduated approach to better identify and meet need early, with a view to improving provision and, in turn, helping to alleviate some of the financial pressures.

RESOLVED
(i) That the contents of the report be noted and supported.
(ii) That further savings ideas continue to be shared

5 SCHOOL BALANCES 2021-22

Consideration was given to a report from Director of Education (Tameside and Stockport) and the Assistant Director, Finance, which provided an update on the surplus balances held by schools at the end of the 2021-22 financial year.

Members were informed that overall balances had reduced by £0.060m or 1% compared to 2020-21. It was noted that primary balances had reduced £1.240m or 20% and that this was partly due to the term time only back pay primary schools had to absorb in 2021-22. Secondary balances had increased by £1.200m or 70%. Special school balances had reduced by £0.020m or 1%. Again, this was, in part, attributable to the impact of term time only back pay.

It was explained that there were 17 schools with excess surplus balances at the end of 2021-22. These schools had either exceeded the approved surplus balance submitted to the Local Authority in June 2021, or the school didn't submit a return to hold balances above the sector threshold but their year-end actual balances had been above the threshold. In line with the Balance Mechanism Scheme, clawing these excess balances back at a rate of 50% would mean that £348,327 could potentially be clawed back.

Members were reminded that the Capital Reserve Scheme had previously been introduced and a request to utilise this had been received from 2 schools with a total ear-marked reserve of £390,000.

It was explained that the 17 schools at risk of potential claw back had been written to and this had been raised with Schools' Funding Group on 18 May 2022, who, although they acknowledged the pressures facing schools, supported the recommendation to invoke the clawback for 2021-22 balances.

Discussion ensued in relation to exceptional circumstances and the transfer of balances to capital reserve for 3 years.

RESOLVED
(i) That the contents of the report be noted
(ii) That the clawback mechanism for 2021-22 surplus balances be approved, in principle, with exceptions to be further discussed at the next meeting of Schools' Forum

6 SCHEME OF FINANCING FOR SCHOOLS 2022-23

Consideration was given to a report from the Assistant Director, Finance, which outlined the changes to Tameside Scheme of financing for Schools. It was noted that changes were needed to the scheme to update for DfE directed changes and to reflect local changes.

Members were made aware that there had been a directed revision of the Salix Scheme, which had now been removed from the Scheme of Financing and this scheme had now been closed.

With regard to local revisions, this was in relation to the budget share, which was payable from the LA to schools and was in response to feedback, which had highlighted previous, additional administrative burdens.

The revision was to change the payment of budget shares to schools from12 monthly instalments to 10. The total sum would be divided in equal 11th's and paid to schools in 10 instalments, which would be paid in all months except March, with 2/11ths paid in July.

This change had undergone a period of consultation, where 79.17% of respondents had supported the suggested changes.

RESOLVED
(i) That the Secretary of State's directed revisions for inclusion in the scheme be noted
(ii) That changes to the Tameside Scheme of Financing for Maintained Schools be agreed

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED
That the next meeting of The Schools Forum be held on Tuesday 27 September 2022 at 10am.

CHAIR