

## SCHOOLS FORUM: MINUTES

Date: Friday 15 January 2021

Time: 10.00am – 11.00am

Venue: Virtual meeting in line with the Schools Forums (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 making provisions to enable schools forums to meet remotely while they are unable to meet physically in a room during the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID19)

Present:

Maintained Primary Heads - Liz Bassett, Sasha Howard and Guy Underwood

Academy Primary - Susannah Connell

Other Academy Sector Appointments – Adrian Ball, Christopher Bennet, Jonathan Culpin (Chairman), Ryan Kelsall, John King, Richard Spencer and Patsy Peres

Maintained Pupil Referral Unit – Leah Miller

Early Years Reference Group - Deborah Parfitt

Post 16 Further Education - Jeremy Lloyd

Maintained Governor - Paul Stratford (Vice-Chairman)

Maintained Nursery School - Claire Palmer

Maintained Special School - Joanne Hardwick

Cambridgeshire County Council - Councillor Simon Bywater, Councillor Peter Downes and Councillor Simone Taylor.

Observers – Julie Cornwell

Officers - J Lewis, Service Director Education, T Oviatt-Ham – Democratic Services Officer and M Wade, Strategic Finance Business Partner.

Apologies: Simon Bainbridge, Joe McCrossan, Jon Duveen and Andrew Reed

Quorum on current voting membership: 8

### 173. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies received from Simon Bainbridge, Joe McCrossan, Jon Duveen and Andrew Reed

No declarations of interest were made.

### 174. Schools Forum Minutes – 16 December 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2020 were approved as a correct record.

### 175. Minutes Action Log

The forum noted the minute action log.

### 176. Proposed Future Dates for Schools Forum 2021-22

The forum received a report that outlined the proposed dates for Schools Forum meetings from November 2021 to July 2022.

It was resolved to:

Approve the dates for future forum meetings as set out section 3 of the report.

### 177. School Funding Update Report – January 2021

The forum considered a report that provided an update on the latest position in respect of the Schools Budget setting process for 2021/22 and addressed some of the questions raised at the previous meeting of Schools Forum in December 2020.

The Service Director, Education and the Strategic Finance Business Partner gave a joint presentation of the report that provided information to support the 2021/22 Schools budget setting process and covered the following areas:

- Update on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) position following December announcements.
- Update on the local budget proposals, including illustrative school by school budgets
- Update on the proposed Early Years funding proposals
- Summary and Next Steps

The presentation can be found at appendix 1 of the minutes.

The Service Director, Education explained that he had received a phonecall the night before from the Department for Education (DfE) rejecting the disapplication request put forward by the Children and Young Peoples

Committee (CYP) to the Secretary of State for Education for a transfer of funding of 1.0%, approximately £3.8m between the Schools Block and High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant for the 2021/22 school budget setting process.

### **National Funding Announcement**

The Strategic Finance Business Partner explained that the 2020/21 figures included estimates of the Teachers' Pension Grant (TPG) and Teachers Pensions Employers Contribution Grant (TPECG) to be received to allow an overall comparison between years. (Approximately £17.6m in the Schools Block and £0.9m in the High Needs Block). He explained that as a result actual published DfE figures may differ. He clarified that the net of the baselined grants there is an increase in the Schools Block of approximately £17.3m / 4.5% over 2020/21 funding levels.

### **Final budget proposals for Schools Block**

The Service Director, Education explained that there were very limited options for treatment of headroom. He clarified that the first option was to transfer the headroom to the High Needs Block – current figure of £634k equates to 0.16% of the Schools Block (excluding TPG/TPECG). All schools would still receive funding based on the base NFF rates – 2% MFG and no funding cap. He explained that the second option would be to allocate the headroom through the formula – this would be achieved by scaling up all pupil-led factors. He advised the Forum that option one would delay the cut in funding.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the final budget proposals for Schools Block section of the presentation:

- Highlighted the extensive additional COVID costs that Schools had already had to deal with as well as the additional Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) that had been agreed with no Special School places available until September 2022.
- Sought assurances that the additional 10% would not also be taken at the same time. The Service Director, Education acknowledged the difficulties that Schools were facing in relation to mounting COVID costs. He clarified that the cut equated to approximately £5.50 per pupil, and that this would buy some time. He stated that he could not promise the additional 10% would be delayed for the whole financial year as the authority could not keep spending money that it they did not have. He explained that the offer proposed bought some time.
- Sought clarity on whether the decision today at forum was just going through the motions and that the Children's and Young Persons Committee would agree 0.5%. The Service Director, Education stated that this option as now off the table as the displacement request had been rejected by Government. He clarified the options were 0.16% or 0%. He stated that the cumulative deficit in the high needs block was

growing year on year and this had an effect on the general reserves and balance sheet for the whole of the Council. He highlighted that there were other authorities that were 100% over their DSG deficit. He explained that there were ongoing discussions about how this would be managed going forwards.

- Queried whether money could be moved between primary and secondary levels in a trust if this was needed.
- Highlighted that 0.16% would not have a huge impact on overall budgets and that schools were in an inadequate position and that it would be sensible and reasonable to act collectively to delay further cuts particularly to EHCP top up funding.

### **Final budget proposals for High Needs Block**

The Strategic Finance Business Partner clarified that sparsity had not been included in the rates presented to the forum. He stated that there was no initial change proposed to Special School Top-up rates (due to 0% MFG protection arrangements). He explained that TPG/TPECG to special schools would be allocated based on £660 per place. (£275 per place 5/12th April 21 – August 21 and £385 per place 7/12th September 21 – March 22). He clarified that there would be an increase in funding to Pilgrim PRU based on national uplift for Hospital provision and TPG/TPECG. He explained that Enhanced Resource Base (ERB) funding was to be reviewed as part of ongoing ERB review and that the consultation on the proposed 10% reduction in top-up rates for mainstream schools was to be delayed.

### **Final budget proposals Central Schools Block**

The Strategic Finance Business Partner stated that the final Central School Service Block (CSSB) allocation of £6.48m which was a reduction from £7.03m. He explained that this included further 20% reduction in funding for Historic Commitments and increased allocation for retained duties, including centrally employed TPG/TPECG. He clarified that the Copyright License costs (excluding VAT) had increased from £450k to £503k and that Local Authorities and schools (including academies) did not need to negotiate individual licences. He stated that the DfE paid the cost, including VAT, to the agencies and provided this as a service to Local Authorities as a charge to the DSG. He stated that this would be met from the CSSB rather than being a direct cost to schools.

### **Final budget proposals Early Years Block**

The Strategic Finance Business Partner explained that there was a National increase in 2021/22 of £44m which equated to an 8p per hour increase for funded two-year-olds and a 6p per hour increase for all three- and four-year-olds. He explained that the Early Years Funding guidelines restricted Local Authorities to retaining a maximum of 5% of funding centrally. He clarified that the proposed funding retained centrally by the Local Authority would account

for approximately 4.2%. He stated that this included an additional £250k for 2 year olds Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) previously funded from in-year underspends.

The Service Director, Education stated that Early Years services were in a very difficult position and there were additional pressures on them in relation to settings remaining open to all children in the current lockdown, he stated that there were issues in relation to sustainability going forwards and the Local Authority was currently looking at a protection arrangement including seeking funding support. He explained that he would update the forum on any actions take going forward. **ACTION**

Individual members raised the following points in relation to final budget proposals for Early Years Block section of the presentation:

- Highlighted that there were different pressures in relation to early years settings that were not attached to schools and that those that were attached to schools could look at efficiency gains as they tended to have bigger budgets.

### **Next Steps**

The Strategic Finance Business Partner explained that the final budget proposals would go to Children and Young People Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> January for approval and the APT submission deadline to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) was 21<sup>st</sup> January. He clarified that budgets would then be issued to Primary and Secondary Schools (academy budgets would be illustrative only as final budgets) in late January/early February and would then be confirmed by the ESFA with illustrative budgets to be published for Special Schools in late February.

The Chairman reiterated that the impacts of COVID needed to be reviewed both in the short and long term. The Service Director, Education reiterated that he would bring a report back to Forum in March scoping out the impacts on the key sectors particularly in relation to early years and SEN. **ACTION**

It was resolved to:

1. Approve the transfer of the identified headroom £634k\* / 0.16% to the High Needs Block subject to no other block transfers being approved.
2. Comment on the local budget proposals
3. Approve the Early Years Block centrally retained funding

## **178. Schools Forum Agenda Plan Update**

The Service Director, Education explained that a report on COVID impacts would be brought to the next meeting of the Forum on 24 March 2021.

It was resolved to:

Note the agenda plan.

### Date of Next Meeting

The Cambridgeshire Schools Forum will meet next on Wednesday 24 March 2021 at 10am.

Chairman