

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY, 22ND NOVEMBER, 2019**

In Attendance:-

Deborah Ball (Treeton Primary (Academy) (in the Chair);

John Coleman – Nexus Director (Special Academy)

Dom Curran – Aston Academy

Dean Fenton (Head of Access to Education)

Neil Hardwick (Head of Finance)

Christina Hill – GMB Representative

Andy Krabbendam – Kiveton Park Infant and Harthill Primary (Academy)

Jenny Lingrell – Assistant Director, Commissioning, Performance and Inclusion

David Naisbitt – Oakwood High School (Academy)

Vera Njelic (Principal Finance Officer)

Kirsty Peart - Sitwell Infant (Maintained)

Alan Richards – Secondary Governors

Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI)

Paul Silvester – Newman Special School (Maintained)

Helen Simpson – Ferham Primary (Maintained)

Nevine Towers – Diocese of Sheffield

Also in attendance for part of the meeting was Sally Hodges, Interim Director of Children and Young People's Services, who presented a short statement on her role and position moving forward.

Apologies for Absence:-

Lianne Camaish – Aspire

Pepe DiLasio – Assistant Director, Education

Peter Gerrard – Rawmarsh Nursery

Mary Jarrett – Head of Inclusion

Lynn Pepper – Herringthorpe Infant School (Maintained)

Steve Rhodes – Winterhill School (Academy)

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest from the agenda to report.

13. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 27TH SEPTEMBER, 2019

Agreed:- that the minutes of the last meeting held on 27th September, 2019 be approved as a true and accurate record.

14. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

With regards to Minute No. 7 (Exclusions Strategy Update) and the submission of a proposed briefing paper, this would be considered at the next meeting of the Forum.

15. HIGH NEEDS SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report presented by Neil Hardwick, Head of Finance, and Jenny Lingrell, Assistant Director for Commissioning, Performance and Inclusion, which summarised the increase in the number of Education and Health Care Plans, the growth in demand for specialist provision and the financial position in 2019/20 of the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and the revised cumulative deficit. The recent growth in volume through increased demand for special educational places and the impact on cost was outlined and compared against previous years.

The High Needs Block Recovery Plan aimed to bring in-year expenditure in line with the annual budget allocation and focus on a longer term plan which would contribute to reducing the cumulative deficit.

Reference was made to the educational setting for children and young people with education and health care plans and where there were increases (and pressures) in terms of placements.

In addition to providing education provision for children with SEND the High Needs Block also funded Alternative Provision for those pupils that have been excluded from schools and academies into Pupil Referral Units.

The 2019/20 High Needs Block (HNB) was £34.5m (including the £2.8m transfer from the schools block) and remained under significant pressure due to rising numbers of children supported in specialist provision, the rising costs of Education Health Care (EHC) plans and growth in numbers accessing Alternative Provision.

The forecast at the end of October, 2019 showed an in-year pressure of £3.3m an increase of £867k on the previous period. The projections based on the DSG recovery plan assumptions and included increases on AP places, anticipated growth on EHCs numbers and the implementation of new developments linked to the SEND Sufficiency Strategy.

Reference was also made to the educational setting for children and young people with education and health care plans and where there were increases (and pressures) in terms of placements.

Information was also shared on the Deficit and Recovery Plan and its variances which had been submitted, the unit costs for social care residential placements, Post 16 contracts, cost of pupil referral units and

other variances for education other than at school placements.

The recovery plan also reflected the SEND Sufficiency Strategy Phases 1 and 2 that would provide a further 111 additional local places from September, 2019 onwards.

This meant there were £3.3 million of pressures being alleviated by £2.8 million redirection from the Schools Block. A number of key areas were, therefore, being focused on to reduce the High Needs Block pressures as detailed in the report submitted.

Discussion ensued on the current position, whether children excluded from school were having an impact and methodology and costings for notional budgets.

Agreed:- (1) That the growth in Education and Health Care Plans in Rotherham be noted.

(2) That the increased demand for Specialist Education provision be noted.

(3) That the actions in place to mitigate and minimise forecast pressures be noted.

(4) That the in-year High Needs forecast pressures of £3.291m as per October 2019 be noted.

(5) That the progress against the recovery plan which will enable future budget sustainability be noted.

(6) That the recent ESFA Consultation on changes to the conditions of the DSG Grant and how the local authority must carry forward the whole of the overspend to the schools budget in future years be noted.

16. MID-YEAR HIGH NEEDS BLOCK UPDATE

Jenny Lingrell, Assistant Director of Commissioning, Performance and Inclusion, provided an update on the SEN and SEMH Strategy and the potential links to issues with exclusions, management of pressures, funding arrangements and plans and how work had commenced on the overall strategy.

The Forum were mindful of the pressures on all schools and the escalation of need across the whole system. This was a complex area with different strands moving in different directions.

Agreed:- That the information and detail be noted.

Action:- All

17. SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA 2020/21 CONSULTATION OUTCOME

Consideration was given to the report presented by Vera Njelic, Principal Officer (Schools Finance), which set out the indicative proposals and sought approval decisions (where needed) for two areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2020/21:-

- Schools block.
- Central schools services block.

This requirement to consult with schools, academies and the Schools' Forum was in respect of planned changes to the local funding formula including the method, principals and rules that were to be adopted. The final decisions in respect of the local formula remained with the Local Authority.

It was, therefore, necessary for the Schools' Forum to decide upon specific elements in accordance with the powers and responsibilities assigned to the Schools' Forum by the ESFA.

There were changes proposed both in terms of the formula factors being used and the individual rates that would be applied to those factors. Nationally, the ESFA were looking to reduce basic entitlement and increase those payable under additional educational needs (particularly low attainment).

Last year the Local Authority suggested that the future years should be used as a transition to the national funding formula and where possible seek to change local factors/rates to bring them in line with the national ones as this would provide for the best possible transition to the national formula. This was a view that was supported within Schools' Forum and the strategy that Rotherham had adopted.

To ensure schools and academies were in receipt of the indicative increase in the 2020/21 Local Authority's schools block allocation and due to the fact that local rates for primary, KS3 and KS4 AWPU were significantly higher than those under the NFF, the Local Authority was aiming to increase the MFG to between +1.0% and +1.84%.

A vote was, therefore, required on a number of proposals which were based on the consultation responses received from individual schools and academies which were set out in detail as part of this report.

In accordance with the regulations, only certain members were allowed to participate in a vote regarding the local funding formula. Other members that did not represent schools could engage and participate in discussions, but were not eligible to vote.

Discussion ensued on the process of the consultation, where it had been distributed to, voting by proxy and the responses received.

Agreed:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the voting as indicated below be incorporated into the school and academy local funding formula for 2020/21 (as far as was possible) for submission to the ESFA on the 21st January, 2020:-

Question 1 – do you agree with the principle that Rotherham is adopting in terms of prioritising an increase to the MFG?

Vote:- 9 For 0 Against

Question 2 – considering the borough as a whole, and to ensure support for the most vulnerable children and young people in the district, do you support the Local Authority's request to transfer 1.5% from the schools block to the high needs block?

Vote:- 9 For 0 Against

Question 3 – do you agree that the Local Authority should continue to provide for a growth fund? It is estimated for 2020/21 a budget of £700,000 is required.

Vote:- 9 For 0 Against

Question 4 - do you agree that funding from the central school services block can continue to be held centrally for the services outlined above?

Vote:- 9 For 0 Against

Question 5 – do maintained schools wish to de-delegate monies to create a Financial Difficulties Contingency fund of £150,000 to support those schools with a financial deficit position?

Vote:- 0 For 3 Against

Question 6 - do maintained schools wish to de-delegate funds again for trade unions (£1.95 per pupil), they would no longer need to buy back from the portfolio of services?

Vote:- 0 For 3 Against

Action:- Neil Hardwick/Vera Njelic

18. MID-YEAR EARLY YEARS BLOCK UPDATE & 2020/21 FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT

Consideration was given to the report which provided a mid-year update on the Early Years Block spend and update on the recent funding announcement for 2020/21.

The Department for Education (DfE) budget allocation for the Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant (EY DSG) for 2019/20 was set out in detail as part of the report and would provide the funding for early education places in schools and other early years providers. This budget would be adjusted retrospectively in 2020/21 based on January 2020 census returns.

Final budget adjustments for 2018/19, taking into account numbers of children accessing their entitlement in January 2020 led to a retrospective budget adjustment of £598k. £200k of this budget had been allocated to a contingency budget with the remaining balance allocated to the funding of the Inclusion Support Grant for 2019/20.

The Forum noted the DfE had announced the early years national funding formula rates for 2020/21 and it was intended that a report was to be submitted to the Directorate Leadership team before the end of the Autumn term and the Early Education Working Group with proposals for the local single funding formula for 2020/21. A further report would, therefore, be submitted to the Schools' Forum in early 2020.

Discussion ensued on the drivers for the budget adjustment, forecasted figures where the census was incorrect and how the adjustment had been configured and broken down. It was noted that some benchmarking activity had taken place following challenge, but further information was, therefore, required.

Agreed:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That further information be provided to the Schools' Forum on the drivers for the budget adjustment, forecasted figures where the census was incorrect and how the adjustment had been configured and broken down.

Action:- Aileen Chambers

19. PUPIL GROWTH FUND 2020/21

Consideration was given to the report presented by Dean Fenton, Head of Access to Education, which provided details of the impact of education infrastructure following school expansions and the allocation of funding based on numbers on roll on census day.

Using the previously agreed formula for funding allocations for new and expanding schools it was recommended that an amount of £700k be approved from the Pupil Growth element within the Schools Block for 2020/21 to cover the expansion implications and new school pre start up implications.

There were always risks and uncertainties when a school expansion took place as, increasing pupil numbers in one school could impact on another schools numbers. However, pupil numbers were rising across the Borough and the trend was set to continue in to the future with the implementation of the Local Plan.

Confirmation would, therefore, be sought from expanding schools funded as part of basic need in relation to the creation of additional classes and the staffing implications after the first late applications allocation round

(mid-May) following the National Offer days for primary and secondary place allocation (1st March/16th April respectively).

A further report was to be submitted in June/July, 2020 confirming the allocation amounts based on pupil numbers and staffing implications for establishing a new classroom.

The pre start up allocations for a new school were pre-determined as a set amount subject to the number of year groups a new school opened to.

Discussion ensued on the differences between expansion and growth and the need for more clarity in the formulae.

Agreed:- (1) That an amount of £700k from the Pupil Growth element within the Schools Block for 2020/21 to cover the expansion implications and new school pre start up implications be approved.

(2) That a further report be submitted detailing the individual allocation amounts for expanding schools.

20. ROTHERHAM SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS

Consideration was given to the Rotherham Scheme for Financing Schemes document that had been circulated with the agenda papers.

This funding framework replaced the Local Management of Schools and was based on the legislative provisions of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Agreed:- That the report be received and the contents noted.

21. ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS CONNECT SERVICE

Consideration was given to the report presented by Susan Gray, Service Leader (Digital Services), which detailed how the Schools' Connect Service offered ICT support services, through individual Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for schools to buy back.

The number of schools taking up support services had dropped steadily over the last few years and sharply over the last year as a result of the formation of larger Academy Trusts providing their own ICT Services, and/or the take up of third-party provision at reduced cost.

It was apparent that with a further thirty-eight schools no longer buying back Schools Connect services, expenditure would exceed income in the 2020/21 financial year and beyond.

Given this situation it had become difficult to retain staff and consequently difficult to deliver a quality and valued service. As a result, the Council were intending to close the Schools Connect service at the end of the

current financial year.

The schools currently buying back services would need to find an alternative web provider(s) for the services they wished to continue to need. There were several alternative providers who may provide some or all the needs.

Whilst the services would be withdrawn the Council was prepared to consider providing internet and content filtering services, which would be subject to more specific discussion.

Schools Connect had historically and to date provided support to schools in maintaining data quality standards and key statutory performance returns to the Local Education Authority via the B2B SIMS Service. Whilst RMBC would continue to provide the B2B SIMS Service for schools, the Council would not be able to apply any changes to a specific schools' configuration. That would need to be undertaken by the school themselves or through their provider.

As a result of the intended closure of the service, schools would need to enter into their own arrangements with Capita UK for the continued provision of the SIMS system.

It was, therefore, intended to write to all current schools to give notice of the Council's intention to terminate the service on 31st March, 2020 and in conjunction with schools, arrange to terminate or novate third-party related supply contracts to ensure expiry or novation with effect from 1st April, 2020 – within the necessary contract termination period.

Schools would have to migrate to their own Microsoft Office 365 Tenancy and have to provide their own email and Microsoft Office 365 Applications. The Council could assist with this transition.

Discussion ensued on the short timeframe for withdrawal of the service and the impact this would have on those schools currently subscribing to the School's Connect Service.

Whilst the service could not broker any other support for the schools, they were happy to building in an overlap facility and support schools in their transitions.

It was, therefore, suggested that relevant communications be distributed to all schools to make them aware and prepare them for the Schools' Connect Service being withdrawn.

Agreed:- (1) That the content of this report and the intention of RMBC to close the Schools Connect service on 31st March, 2020 for the reasons outlined be noted.

(2) That the actions that will be taken by RMBC and those required of

schools, between now and the closure of the Schools Connect service, as highlighted in this report be noted.

(3) That the commitment to continue to provide network/internet and content filtering services, so long as this remains viable following discussion and confirmation from those schools that wished to keep this provision from RMBC be acknowledged.

(4) That relevant communications be distributed to all schools to make them aware and prepare them for the Schools' Connect Service being withdrawn.

Action:- All/Jenny Lingrell

22. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Consideration was given to the following matters:-

(a) Exclusions

For consideration at the next meeting.

(b) Agenda Papers

It was requested that all reports for agenda items be circulated in advance of the meeting and be incorporated into the full agenda pack to avoid reports being circulated on the day and presented by relevant officers.

Agreed:- That the information be noted.

Action:- All

23. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed:- That the next meeting of the Rotherham Schools' Forum take place on Friday, 17th January, 2020 commencing at 8.30 a.m. at Rotherham Town Hall.