

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 25 JUNE 2021**

In Attendance:-

Deborah Ball (Treeton Primary (Academy) (in the Chair);
 Angela Acomb – Primary Maintained Governor
 Raymund Brent – Primary Maintained Governor
 Lianne Camaish, Aspire
 John Coleman – Nexus MAT
 Pepe Di'lasio – Wales High (Academy)
 Dean Fenton - Head of Access to Education
 Neil Hardwick – Head of Finance, CYPS, RMBC
 Nathan Heath – Assistant Director of Education, CYPS, RMBC
 Janet Hodgkinson – GMB Representative
 Andy Krabbendam – Kiveton Park Infant and Harthill Primary (Academy)
 Angela McComb – Primary Maintained Governor
 David Naisbitt – Oakwood High (Academy)
 Vera Njelic - Principal Finance Officer, RMBC
 Kirsty Peart - Sitwell Infant (Maintained)
 Lynne Pepper – Herringthorpe Infant (Maintained)
 Debbie Pons – Clerk, RMBC
 Alan Richards – Secondary Governor
 Jackie Ross – Interim Head of SEND, CYPS
 Steve Scott – PVI Sector
 Sharon Stones – Head of Arnold Nursery and Children's Centre
 Paul Silvester – Newman Special School (Maintained)
 Nevine Towers – Diocese of Sheffield

Apologies were received from:-

Ian Henderson - H.R. Officer, RMBC

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to today's virtual meeting and introductions were made.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Pepe Di'lasio representing Wales High (Academy) declared an interest in Minute No. 3 (Membership of the Schools Forum) on the grounds that he was a NEU Trade Union Member. He did not vote on that item.

3. CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM

Further to Minute No. 99(c) of the previous meeting the Forum were asked to consider the inclusion of a trades union representation from the

NEU on the membership.

The Chair also asked that if any Schools' Forum member also wished to have a named substitute then they should forward this to the Clerk for it to be agreed at a forthcoming meeting.

Agreed:- That Colin Price be the named NEU member and that Patricia Graham be the named substitute.

(2) That any suggestions for named substitutes for other Schools Forum members be forwarded to the Clerk for inclusion on a future meeting for approval.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16th April, 2021.

Agreed:- That the minutes of the last meeting held on 16th April, 2021, be approved as a true and accurate record.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no matters arising that were no contained within the agenda items for this meeting.

6. 2020/21 OUTTURN AND 2021/22 FUNDING

Consideration was given the report presented by Neil Hardwick, Head of Schools' Finance which provided information on the 2020/21 outturn position of the dedicated schools grant (DSG).

A summary was also provided on details to maintained members of Schools Forum as to the surplus/deficit balances of the maintained schools within Rotherham.

The report also outlined the national picture on the High Needs Block as part of the overall Dedicated Schools Grant and the additional funding the Government was investing in education in the next two years as part of its spending review.

Further information was provided on the DSG central reserve deficit balance brought forward from 2020/21 being £19.9m. Pressures on high needs expenditure continued with a further deficit in 2020/21 of £2.0m which had contributed to a net deficit in the DSG Central Reserve of £21.3m after taking account of DSG balances in other DSG funding blocks and PRU balances.

The local authority had modelled the impact of the January 2021 early years census data and were expecting a reduction in funding of £222k.

The High Needs Block overspend was due to a number of factors; an increase in Education Health and Care Plans, an increase in the number of young people aged 16 to 25 with an EHCP who were now the responsibility of the Local Authority to fund, an increase in the number of children accessing higher cost provision and an increase in the number of pupils in Alternative Provisions (Pupil Referral Units).

In terms of Early Years the Government spending review announced additional funding for schools and high needs, compared to 2019-20, which would rise by £4.8 billion for 2021-22 and £7.1 billion for 2022-23.

In 2021/22 the £4.8 billion is split £4.020 billion to the Schools Block and £0.780 billion to the High Needs Block; the funding split for future years was still to be determined. For Rotherham this was an additional £5.5m for schools and £5.3m in the High Needs Block.

With regards to deficit balances individual schools were permitted to carry forward balances to be spent or replenished in subsequent financial years. In total, the carry forward on individual school budgets was an overall combined surplus of £3.180m.

Surplus balances, however, as of the 31st March, 2021 when compared with 2019/20 reflected an increase in year of £1.022m.

The increase in the level of surplus took account of the five schools that have converted to academies during 2020/2021. The in-year academy conversions were schools with cumulative balances of £303k as at 31ST March. 2020.

Of the total 2020/21 surplus balances, 10 schools hold balances above the thresholds set out in the Scheme for Financing Schools. The Scheme for Financing Schools sets out the financial arrangement between the local authority and the maintained schools. The scheme states that if a schools balance has exceeded the allowable surplus (8% of school budget share for nursery, primary and special, 5% for secondary) and allowing for commitments and any amounts assigned for a specific purpose then the local authority may deduct an amount equal to the excess balance.

Schools have recently submitted excess surplus balance plans detailing intended use.

Of the seven schools that were previously identified to be in deficit, three have now entered a surplus balance position, one had academy status with a deficit balance of £11k and three schools remain in deficit.

For all schools that were in a deficit position, individual three year budget recovery plans were in the process of being compiled. These would then be subject to formal review throughout the year.

A further update would be provided at the next Forum meeting in September, 2021.

Agreed:- (1) That the information contained within this report, particularly that the reserve balances have increased to £21.3m (centrally retained), be noted.

(2) That the deficit balance be noted, which was subject to change as this will be dependent on the early years adjustment for the Spring 2021 census count. Within the figures, an anticipated reduction of £222k has been accounted for.

(3) That a further update be provided for the next meeting.

7. DSG HNB RECOVERY PLAN

An update was provided via Nathan Heath, Neil Hardwick and Jackie Ross on the DSG/HNB Recovery Plan and the informal discussions that had been taking place with the DfE which would continue on a frequent basis.

For some Local Authorities in the same position as Rotherham these discussions have led to a Safety Valve Agreement, which would effectively agree a five-year repayment plan with an eventual write off. It was hoped that Rotherham, from the discussions, could be considered for the same such agreement. However, no presumption could be made that this would be extended to include Rotherham.

It was clear to Local Authorities there was a lack of High Needs Capital and insufficient funding.

In order to understand the position further for Rotherham's High Needs Budget a presentation was delivered via Powerpoint highlighting:-

- Strategy and Approach to the Plan.
- Understand and Managing Demand.
- The Improving Financial DSG Position.
- The need for strong grip.
- Benchmarking data to inform local system cultural change – Moderate Learning Difficulties.
- Benchmarking data to inform local system cultural change – SEMH.
- Benchmarking data to inform local system cultural change – Severe Learning Difficulties and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties.
- Benchmarking data to inform local system cultural change - Scrutinising our budget for best value - Place Funding.
- Benchmarking data to inform local system cultural change - Scrutinising our budget for best value - Top-up funding.
- Engaging stakeholders through strong governance and leadership.

- Shared commitment to good outcomes for children and young people.
- SEND Sufficiency Progress.
- LAC Sufficiency and transport.
- National, regional and sub-regional engagement.
- Strategic Approach to Spend Triangle.
- Next Steps on SEND Sufficiency Phases.

Forum Members welcomed the presentation and the progress to date. Due to the sequence of meetings taking place a further update on progress would take place at the next Forum meeting.

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

(2) That a further update be provided for the next meeting.

8. HIGH NEEDS SUB-GROUP UPDATE

Paul Silvester gave a brief summary of the outcome of the High Needs Sub-Group Meeting which took place on Monday, 14th June, 2021.

The Group looked at in detail at:-

- The current data available.
- Multi-agency working and partnerships.
- Lack of contact and engagement.
- Numbers of Education and Health Care Plans.
- Funding and regulatory structures.
- Expectations from the Green Paper.
- Sharing of Expertise.

The input of Forum Members was welcome and invitations could be extended to anyone interested in becoming part of the Sub-Group.

A further meeting was scheduled for 12th July, 2021 and a further update on progress would be provided for the next Forum Meeting.

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

(2) That a further update be provided to the next Forum meeting.

9. PUPIL PREMIUM

Neil Hardwick gave an update on Pupil Premium which was to be based on the October census rather than January.

In Rotherham this impact was around £900k on the school sector due to the Free School Meal voucher system. There had been a significant

increase in family eligibility and registrations.

Agreed:- That the update be received and noted.

10. FREE SCHOOL MEALS UPDATE

An update was provided by Neil Hardwick and Nathan Heath on the success and progress of the Free School Meal voucher system which had now been extended to include the six week holiday period.

This was still subject to final approval and details would be confirmed shortly.

Agreed:- That the update be received and noted.

11. SUMMER SCHOOLS

Nathan Heath provided the Schools Forum with an update on the situation with Summer Schools. The DfE had recently issued Summer Schools guidance with the aim of the programme being to deliver a blend of academic education and enrichment activities.

Schools would be asked to determine which pupils, from any year group, would most benefit from a summer school probably focusing this provision primarily on pupils making the transition into Year 7 and those eligible for Free School Meals.

Agreed:- That the update be received and noted.

12. HEALTHY ACTIVITIES AND FOOD PROGRAMME GRANT

Amy Woodhead provided insight into the Healthy Activities and Food Programme Grant which would provide holiday provision for children who received benefits-related free school meals.

Local authorities were being asked to ensure that the offer of free holiday club provision was available for all children eligible for and in receipt of free school meals in their area. This did not mean they were all required to attend as the provision was voluntary.

Local authorities must get written approval to use their funding to provide free or subsidised holiday club places for children who were not in receipt of benefits-related free school meals.

Some local authorities may co-ordinate their own provision and others may choose to work with another organisation to co-ordinate the provision on their behalf.

There was a good spread of provision across the borough and those children who were eligible would be provided with a unique reference

number which must be given to the provider in order to receive their free place. These numbers would be sent to schools initially.

Further publicity on the pack on offer would be issued to schools shortly so this could be communicated to eligible groups.

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

13. SEMH FREE SCHOOL UPDATE

Nathan Heath updated Forum Members on the current position with SEMH Free School as part of SEND Sufficiency Phase 3.

Well Spring Academy Trust from Barnsley was the successful bidder.

Ongoing dialogue would continue with the DfE providing reassurance that the governance structures were in place and contractual arrangements secured.

Agreed:- That the update on progress to date be received and noted.

14. EDUCATION RECOVERY SUPPORT

Vera Njegic introduced the guidance that had been provided about the programmes and activities the Department for Education was funding to support education recovery and children and young people's wellbeing.

This included the recovery package announced in June 2021 as well as existing programmes announced in June 2020 and February 2021. There were programmes and activities for pupils and students of all ages, including with consideration to disadvantaged pupils and students and those with SEND.

This guidance would be circulated to all providers in due course.

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

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no other items of business for consideration.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed:- That the next meeting of the Schools' Forum take place on a virtual basis on Friday, 17th September, 2021 at 8.30 a.m.