

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2021**

In Attendance:-

Deborah Ball (Treeton Primary (Academy) (in the Chair);
Rajmund Brent – Primary Maintained Governor
Lianne Camaish, Aspire
John Coleman – Nexus MAT
Councillor Victoria Cusworth – Cabinet Member for CYPS
Nathan Heath – Assistant Director of Education, CYPS, RMBC
Ian Henderson - H.R. Officer, RMBC
Neil Hardwick – Head of Finance, CYPS, RMBC
Janet Hodgkinson – GMB Representative
Angela McComb – Primary Maintained Governor
Lisa McCall – Wales High (Academy) (Substitute)
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
Colin Price – NEU Representative
Alan Richards – Secondary Governor
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
Mick Burns – NEU (Observer)

Apologies were received from:-

Dom Curran – Aston (Academy)
Andy Krabbendam – CEO JMAT (Academy)

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest reported.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes from the previous meeting held on 17th September 2021.

Agreed:- That the minutes be approved.

4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

With regards to Minute No. 21 (DSG Update) it was confirmed that the Early Years adjustment had now been received.

5. **HNB 2021/22 FINANCE UPDATE**

Neil Hardwick, Head of Schools Finance, provided background information and an update on the latest Dedicated Schools Grant position and the Dedicated Schools Grant projections as outlined in the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan.

As outlined to School Forum in September the 2021/22 High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant had a forecast overspend of £0.756m based on the Dedicated Schools Grant recovery plan and included anticipated growth on EHCs numbers and the implementation of new developments linked to the SEND Sufficiency Strategy. All other Dedicated Schools Grant Blocks were projected to outturn to the funding allocation.

The level of Dedicated Schools Grant central reserves deficit would increase from a deficit of £21.258m (carried forward from 2020/21) to £22.014m at the end of 2021/22. This would equate to 8.07% of the overall Dedicated Schools Grant allocation.

The current year financial position had been input into the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Template in addition to funding assumptions (8%) and the current and future impact of proposed strategies over the forthcoming financial years, which was set out in detail as part of the report.

Based on the funding assumptions it would still require a transfer from the School Block for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years to dampen the in-year financial pressures and avoid a significant increase in the overall Dedicated Schools Grant deficit over this period.

In summary, the financial sustainability of the high needs block still remained a significant cause for concern for the borough and would require the support of the School Forum and High Needs Sub-Group to implement the strategies to assist in supporting the Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block to operate within its annual allocation.

Forum Members would continue to be updated on a regular basis.

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

6. **SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA 2022/23 CONSULTATION OUTCOME**

Consideration was given to the report presented by Vera Njegic, Principa Officer (Schools Finance), which set out the indicative proposals and sought

approval decisions (where needed) for two areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2022/23:-

- Schools block.
- Central schools services block.

As a result of the government's intention to implement a national funding formula for school and high needs funding allocations; 2022/23 represents the fifth year of the Governments' planned transition towards these proposals.

To comply with the ESFA operational guidance, local authorities are required to consult with schools, academies and Schools Forum in respect of planned changes to the schools local funding formula including the method, principals and rules that are to be adopted. The final decisions in respect of the local formula remain with the Local Authority.

The Forum was, therefore, required to decide upon specific elements in accordance with the powers and responsibilities assigned to it by the ESFA and would need to vote on a number of proposals which had been circulated in the report submitted. The proposals were based on the consultation responses received from individual schools and academies.

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.

A narrative and rationale for each of the questions was provided along with any clarification as necessary.

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 2022/23 (as far as was possible) for submission to the ESFA in January, 2022:-

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

For Noting Only - Agreed

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 LA's request to transfer of the 1.5% from the schools block to the high needs block?

Vote:- **8 For** **0 Against**

Question 4 - Do you agree that the Local Authority should continue to provide for a growth fund? It is estimated for 2022/23 a budget from reserve of £250,000 is required.

Vote:- 8 For 0 Against

Question 5 – Do you agree that the Local Authority should continue to provide for a falling rolls fund? It is proposed the fund will be funded from reserve as with the Growth Fund?

Vote:- 8 For 1 Against

Question 6 – 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 7 - Do maintained schools wish to de-delegate monies to create a Financial Difficulties Contingency Fund of £50K to support those schools with a financial deficit position?

Vote:- 2 For 0 Against

Question 8 - Do maintained schools wish to de delegate funds again for trade unions facilities time, they would no longer need to buy back from the portfolio of services?

Vote:- 2 For 0 Against

Action:- Vera Njelic

7. SCHEME FOR FINANCING LOCAL AUTHORITY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (UPDATED SCHEME)

Neil Hardwick, Head of Schools' Finance, confirmed that in line with auditing procedures the scheme for Financial Local Authority Maintain Schools was presented for the Annual Review.

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

8. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND AND FREE SCHOOL MEALS VOUCHERS

Nathan Heath, Assistant Director of Education, provided an overview of the current position with regards to the Household Support Fund and Free School Meals Vouchers which would be considered by the Cabinet on Monday, 22nd November, 2021 for approval.

Again, the benefits would be available to those eligible and passported through to schools once validated by Schools Finance.

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

9. DFE CONSULTATION - REFORMING HOW LOCAL AUTHORITIES' SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FUNCTIONS ARE FUNDED

The Chair invited Nathan Heath, Assistant Director of Education, to deliver his presentation on the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant.

The presentation highlighted:-

- Local Authority school improvement functions and how they are currently funded.
- Core Improvement Activities.
- Additional Improvement Services.
- School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant.
- DfE Proposal.
- Local Authority Actions.
- Proposed Timeline.
- Consultation Questions.
- Next Steps.

Forum Members welcomed the presentation and the detail provided (a copy of the slides would be circulated after the meeting for information).

Forum Members noted the difficulties in managing the consultation timeline.

Discussion ensued on whether this was acting as a prompt for mainstream schools to be guided down the academy route and what would be the costs to schools.

The Authority maintained active support to its mainstream schools, but noted the DfE's position. Regionally there was strong support to align the proposals, but it was suggested this be discussed in context. On this basis it was suggested that this be included on the next Schools' Forum agenda for further discussion.

Agreed:- (1) That Nathan Heath be thanked for his informative presentation.

(2) That the details of the consultation and the action to be taken be noted.

(3) That the consultation be included as an agenda item for discussion at the next Forum meeting in 2022.

Action:- Nathan Heath

10. SAFETY VALVE

Nathan Heath, Assistant Director of Education, provided an update on the progress of the Safety Valve discussions and the viability of the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan.

The discussions, whilst ongoing, were receiving positive support from the DfE and proposals would shortly be submitted. It would be January, 2022 before the Local Authority were advised of the decision of the DfE, which would be personalised specifically for Rotherham and stringently monitored.

Forum Members welcomed the update and sought clarity on the date of the next SEN Sub-Group where it was suggested the Safety Valve be a core agenda item.

It was pointed out that whilst discussions remained ongoing the evidence remained with the DfE and the Authority were not yet in a position to share the detail.

Arrangements were in hand for the next meeting of the SEN Sub-Group once a location had been identified.

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

11. SEND INSPECTION

The Chair invited Nathan Heath, Assistant Director of Education, to deliver his presentation on the Joint Area SEND Inspection.

The presentation highlighted:-

- The Context and Inspection Activity.
- Details of the Main Findings.
- The effectiveness of the local area in identifying children and young people's special educational needs and/or disabilities, what was working well and what the Authority were worried about.
- The effectiveness of the local area in meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities, what was working well and what the Authority were worried about.
- The effectiveness of the local area in improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities, what was working well and what the Authority were worried about.
- Written Statement Of Action (WSOA) and the four identified areas.
- Next Steps.
- Step One: Produce a Written Statement of Action.

- Step Two: Monitoring Progress.

Forum Members welcomed the presentation and the detail provided (a copy of the slides would be circulated after the meeting for information).

Discussion ensued and whilst the detail was received it was felt parts of the inspection were incoherent in places and a little confusing especially around the JSNA with no health or care included and EHCP's with no health and care elements. Officers shared some concerns about the detail and the challenges, but a judgement had to be drawn and an action plan agreed.

In terms of SEMH and the positive level with CAMHS the consistent elements were discussed. This was a national issue and not just locally in Rotherham, but the Authority must not lose sight of the priorities against actions.

In terms of the report it only showed small insight into careers advice with case studies and some evaluation. There were 16-19 challenges due to DWP involvement, but issues were moving forward at a pace with the Project Search Programme.

Rotherham had four major areas it needed to work on compared to others, which provided some recognition of the good work being undertaken. It was suggested the detail be unpicked and looked at in detail as part of the High Needs Sub-Group where more depth could be given to the content.

The Chair of the High Needs Sub-Group suggested that anyone who wished to ask a specific question they contact him direct.

Agreed:- (1) That Nathan Heath be thanked for his informative presentation.

(2) That the detail be received and the content noted.

(3) That the details of the SEND inspection be looked at in more detail at the High Needs Sub-Group (date to be confirmed) and any specific questions relating to the content be forwarded to Paul Silvester, Chair of the High Needs Sub-Group.

12. EDUCATION UNIONS FACILITY TIME

Further to Minute No. 26 of the meeting of the Schools Forum held on 17th September, 2021, consideration was given to the report introduced by Ian Henderson, Human Resources, regarding the per pupil rate used to determine the charge to schools for Trade Union Facility Time buyback.

The total facility time able to be funded from the current buyback budget and afforded to the education unions currently equated to 1.2 FTE (6.25

days), however, a total of 13 days facility time would be required to align to current union membership figures at a ratio of 1 FTE day per 1,000 members, the industry standard.

Benchmarking identified that Rotherham's per pupil charge at £2 was the lowest in the region, being less than half that of our nearest statistical comparator, Barnsley Council at £4.75.

Forum agreed to consult schools on the three options put forward in the report and thirty-one schools responded to the consultation with only one school opting for maintaining the current position (option 1). Twelve opted for an immediate increase to £4.75 (option 2) and eighteen opted for the incremental approach (option 3).

Agreed:- That the report be received and the outcome of the consultation noted with Option 3 being implemented with effect from 1st April, 2022.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

In light of the changes to the school sector breakdown and the academisation of many schools, it was suggested the Constitution and Composition of the Rotherham Schools Forum be reviewed to ensure the membership was fully inclusive and up-to-date.

Forum Members were in agreement with seeking guidance from the Assistant Director of Education and for him to lead action on this matter either by way of him reviewing the composition and constitution and resubmitting it back to the Forum for consideration or for a sub-group to be arranged.

Agreed:- That the Assistant Director of Education be asked to look in detail at the Schools Forum Constitution and Composition.

Action:- Nathan Heath

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed:- That the next meeting of the Schools' Forum take place on a virtual basis on Friday, 14th January, 2022 (moved from 21st January, 2022) at 8.30 a.m.