

DUDLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday 21st January, 2014 at 6.00 pm
at Saltwells Education Development Centre,
Bowling Green Road, Netherton, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Mr Ridney – Chair

Mr Patterson – Vice-Chair

Mrs Belcher, Mr Conway, Mr Derham, Mr Jones, Mr Kelleher, Mr Platford, Mrs Quigley, Ms Rogers, Mrs Ruffles, Mr Shaw, Mr Ward, Mr Warren, Mr Weaver and Mrs Withers.

Person(s) not a member of the Forum but having an entitlement to attend meetings and speak

The Interim Director of Children's Services

Officers

Acting Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education Services);
Children's Services Finance Manager, Senior Principal Accountant and the
Assistant Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Corporate Resources).

Observer

Principal Accountant, Children Services Accountancy (Directorate of
Corporate Resources)

1. INTRODUCTIONS BY THE CHAIR

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of
Mr Bate, Mrs Garratt, Mrs Hannaway, Mr Harris, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs
Wylie and Councillor Crumpton.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That, the minutes of the meeting of the Schools Forum
held on 10th December, 2013, be approved as a correct
record and signed.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The Acting Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education Services) stated that guidance from the DfE in relation to school related union facilities time arrangements had now been received. The guidance and proposed changes would be considered at a future HTCF - Budget Working Group meeting.

5. SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted to provide Schools Forum with a membership update.

The Children's Services Finance Manager advised that since publication of the report, two Members had submitted their resignations with immediate effect from the Forum and therefore the number of vacancies in the membership composition had increased to five. The elections process to fill the vacancies, together with the posts that are due for re-election this year, would commence shortly.

RESOLVED

That the report, and Appendix to the report submitted, in relation to Schools Forum Membership, be noted.

6. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT BUDGET PROCESS 2014/15

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted in relation to the 2014/15 Dedicated Schools Grant budget process.

The Children's Services Finance Manager presented the report and informed members that further reports would be submitted to the Forum at its meetings in February and March 2014, before final schools budgets were determined.

As referred to in the report, the completed Local Authority Funding Reform proforma had been submitted to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and a copy of the completed document was circulated to members, for information, at the meeting.

The report indicated that this item had been discussed at the HTCF - Budget Working Group on 15th January, 2014, however it was clarified that this had not happened as that particular working group meeting had been cancelled following publication of the report.

A Primary School representative referred to paragraph 32 of the report submitted, in particular to the reduction in number of mainstream pupils and requested information with regard to the predicted figures for 2015/16. The Acting Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education Services) stated that he did not have the exact figures to hand, but that these could be provided.

The Senior Principal Accountant presented the Local Authority Funding Reform Proforma and explained the layout and content of the document.

Arising from the presentation, a Primary School representative commented that the £4459.29 cash flat rate set per pupil in the DSG Schools Block differed to the funding allocated to schools as referred to in the Local Authority Funding Reform proforma. The Children's Services Finance Manager confirmed that the £4459.29 was the DfE per pupil allocation of funding coming into Dudley and that was required to fund mainstream schools in addition to the central expenditure budgets, so it was always unlikely that the per pupil rates would be the same.

In response to a further question raised by a Primary School Representative in relation to how Dudley compared with other Local Authorities in relation to Pupil Led Funding, it was stated that a benchmarking exercise had been carried out in respect of 2013/14 data by the HTCF - Budget Working Group in relation to this issue and that Dudley's percentage had been identified as being the highest in the West Midlands. The benchmarking data for 2014/15 would be reviewed at a future meeting of the HTCF - Budget Working Group once the data was available.

Concerns were raised by several members in relation to the Free School Meals Strategy that was to be introduced for Reception pupils and Years 1 and 2 in state Primary Schools and the impact this would have on Pupil Premium Funding. Further information was requested and the possibility of obtaining feedback from Schools that had taken part in the pilot scheme explored. It was also suggested that Local Authority Admission Forms be amended to reflect the possible changes. The Children's Services Finance Manager was sympathetic to the concerns raised, but stated that no detail or guidance in relation to the Scheme had been published or circulated. She confirmed that it had been announced in the capital funding that Dudley would receive £855,000 to spend on improving kitchen and dining facilities in schools, but no notification in relation to revenue funding had been provided by the DfE.

Arising from further questions raised, the Children's Services Finance Manager confirmed that the report that would be submitted to the Forum meeting in February would provide details in relation to the Central Services that are funded through the DSG funding for each block and that the Carbon Reduction Commitment Tax had always been allocated within the DSG Schools Block for payment, but at a lower rate and an update would be provided in further detail at the February meeting.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted, in particular the provisional DSG settlement for 2014/15 and the impact for Dudley, be noted.
- (2) That the submission of the Local Authority Reform proforma to the Education Funding Agency, as circulated at the meeting, be approved.
- (3) That further reports be provided to Forum meetings in February and March, 2014 to include central expenditure budget allocations for Schools Forum approval.

7. BUDGET FACT SHEET NO. 1 – JANUARY 2014

Budget Fact Sheet No.1 – January 2014 was submitted.

The Senior Principal Accountant referred to the proposed increase of employer's contribution to the Local Government Pension Scheme and stated that further detail would be confirmed to schools once all negotiations were complete.

Several Members reiterated their concerns about the lack of detail and guidance published by Central Government in relation to the proposed free school meals strategy for Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils that was proposed to be implemented from September 2014.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the Budget Fact Sheet No. 1 – January, 2014 be noted.

8. SCHOOL AND EARLY YEARS FINANCE (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2013

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the latest amendments to the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2013 as advised by Central Government.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted in relation to the amendments to the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2013, be noted.

9. DUDLEY'S SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS – APPROVAL OF AMENDMENTS FOLLOWING CONSULTATION

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted in relation to the proposed amendments to Dudley's Scheme for Financing Schools following a period of consultation.

The Senior Principal Accountant informed Members that feedback from one School only had been provided during the consultation period and that the amendments made were to reflect both statutory guidance issued by the DfE and a number of local technical amendments.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted be noted.
- (2) That the updated Dudley's Scheme for Financing Schools be approved and implemented with immediate affect.

10. EDUCATION FUNDING AGENCY

The Children's Services Finance Manager reminded members that representatives from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) were now entitled to attend School Forum meetings to observe and to ascertain that the correct procedures and protocols were being followed. EFA Representatives had previously attended School Forum meetings at other Authorities and feedback from these Authorities had been provided.

The Chair confirmed that the EFA representative would be welcome to attend any of the Schools Forum meetings and would also be invited to attend the agenda planning meetings if they so wished, as he believed all relevant regulations and protocols were adhered to.

RESOLVED

That the verbal update given by the Children's Services Finance Manager, be noted.

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That the dates of future meetings be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm.

CHAIR