

MINUTES OF DUDLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 8th July, 2014 at 6.00 pm
at Saltwells Education Development Centre,
Bowling Green Road, Netherton, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Mr. Ridney - Chair

Mrs. Wylie - Vice Chair

Mr. K. Bate, Mr. J. Conway, Mr. C. Derham, Mr. J. Kelleher, Mr. B. Oakley,
Mr. B. Patterson, Mrs. H. Ruffles, Mr. B. Warren and Mr. M. Weaver

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

Councillor T. Crumpton (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning) and Ms. P. Sharratt (Interim Director of Children's Services)

Officers

Mr. H. Powell (Acting Assistant Director of Children's Services - Education Services) (Directorate of Children's Services); Mrs. K. Cocker (Children's Services Finance Manager, Mrs. S. Coates (Senior Principal Accountant) and Mr. J. Jablonski (Assistant Principal Officer - Democratic Services), Directorate of Corporate Resources

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mrs. J. Belcher, Mrs. A. Garrett, Mrs. A. Hannaway, Mr P.Nesbitt, Mrs. J. Quigley, Mr. N. Shaw, Mr. D. Ward and Mrs. G. Withers.

2. Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting of the Schools Forum held on 3rd June, 2014, be approved as a correct record and signed.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

No issues were raised under this Agenda item.

4. Dudley's Schools' Delegated Reserves 2013/14

Prior to the commencement of consideration of this matter, the Chair declared a personal interest in relation to the aspect of this matter relating to the Coseley School. Having declared his interest, he withdrew from the meeting during the consideration of this matter.

Mrs. Wylie (Vice Chair) (in the Chair)

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on financial data in respect of Dudley's schools' reserves for the 2013/14 financial year ended 31st March, 2014.

Table 1 of the report and Appendix A set out the position in more detail.

Consideration was also given to an application for a licensed deficit as indicated in paragraph 8 of the report submitted in respect of the Coseley School.

Following consideration of these matters, it was

Resolved

- (1) That the detailed School Reserves as at 31st March, 2014, as listed at Appendix A of this report, be noted, before publication by the Department for Education.
- (2) That the position whereby, due to falling pupil numbers and a forecast deficit budget position, the Coseley School had submitted an application for a licensed deficit be noted and that it be further noted that this would require endorsement by the Vice Chair of Schools Forum and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning in addition to the Director of Children's Services and the Treasurer and that an update in respect of the School's recovery plan would be reported to Forum at the September meeting.

At the conclusion of this matter, Mrs. Wylie vacated the Chair.

Mr. Ridney - in the Chair

5. Dudley's Behavioural Pupil Referral Unit Review and Restructure

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the latest position in respect of the Pupil Referral Unit behavioural service (Sycamore Short Stay School) review and restructure following the implementation of the 2013/14 Department for Education school funding reforms.

Arising from consideration of this item, it was noted that the school was on-line to have a balanced budget by 2015/16, given the measures taken.

Resolved

That the updated position of the Sycamore Short Stay School following planned relocation onto a single site and staffing structure be noted and that a further update be provided in the Spring of 2015.

6. Financial Support from the High Needs Block for Rosewood Special School

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the proposed provision of financial assistance to Rosewood Special School in 2014/15 from the High Needs Block within the Schools Budget of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

It was reported that the support requested would enable the school to continue functioning and adapt to any changes.

Resolved

That the information contained in the report submitted on the current financial difficulties of Rosewood School be noted and that support be given to the local authority's financial strategy to provide Rosewood School with funding of up to £45,000 for the 2014/15 financial year from the High Needs Block contingency budget which was available to assist Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units in financial difficulties.

7. Feedback on the Consultation on School Funding Arrangements and Changes for 2015/16

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on feedback from consultation held so that a decision could be reached on proposed changes to the school funding arrangements for mainstream schools prior to implementation for the 2015/16 financial year.

During the consideration of this matter an updated Table 1 to the report was circulated at the meeting detailing all the responses that had been received arising from the consultation held on the two questions outlined in that table.

This information had been considered at a meeting of the Budget Working Group held on 2nd July, 2014 and that group had recommended approval of the proposals contained in the updated table.

It was also noted that the Budget Working Group would be giving further consideration, on an on-going basis, to the issue of funding for deprivation and following such consideration would make recommendations to this forum.

Resolved

That, arising from votes taken by those Schools Forum members eligible to vote on this matter:-

- (1) in relation to the question, do you prefer Option 1 (25% clawback of gains) or Option 2 (no clawback of gains) in order to meet the cost of funding the Minimum Funding Guarantee in 2015/16? approval be given to the implementation of Option 2 to remove the clawback of gains for 2015/16; and
- (2) in relation to the question, do you agree that any additional funding that becomes available within the schools budget should be allocated to funding for deprivation? approval be given to the allocation of any permanent funding that becomes available in the schools budget to funding for deprivation.

8. Department for Education Fair Funding Conference - 4th June, 2014

A note setting out Department for Education headlines arising from the Fair Funding Conference held on 4th June, 2014, and details in relation to those headlines was submitted.

Consideration was given to each of the headlines in turn and particular comments were made as follows:-

- That in relation to the Priority School Building Programme - Capital Bids - Round 2, an expression of interest would be submitted by the required date of 21st July, 2014.

- In relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities/Education Healthcare Plans, Mr Warren raised a concern in respect of the funding for teaching assistants, it was noted that this matter would be discussed by the Budget Working Group.
- In relation to the School Improvement Ofsted of Local Authorities, in particular the use of resources criteria, it was reported that further research from the inspections held would be carried out on this particular criteria.
- It was noted, that, as indicated in the note, a number of reports would be submitted to future Forum meetings on the headlines indicated in the note.

Resolved

That the information contained in the note submitted and, as commented on at the meeting, in relation to headlines arising from the Department for Education Fair Funding Conference, 4th June, 2014, be noted.

9. Allocation of Dedicated Schools Grants Reserved 2015/16

Arising from the consideration given at the last meeting of the Forum to the Dedication Schools Grant Outturn, 2013/14 and the consideration given by the Budget Working Group to the allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant Reserve, 2015/16 ,an oral report was given on the consideration given by the Budget Working Group at its meeting on 2nd July, 2014, to this matter.

Arising from the consideration given to the proposed allocation of £2 million in 2015/16 to all schools on a lump sum basis two options were considered, the first, the sharing equally of the £2 million between all schools so that each primary and secondary received £18,500 and, given the implications of this allocation when it was considered on a per pupil basis, an Option 2 involving an allocation of £14,000 to each primary school and £38,500 to each secondary school broadly reflecting the size of the schools.

The recommendation of the Budget Working Group was that consultation should be held on both options but that the preferred option was Option 2.

It was, therefore, reported that there would be a six weeks consultation period commencing on 8th September and ending on 18th October with implementation in April, 2015 of the preferred option.

The Schools Forum would receive a further report at its meeting to be held on 21st October, 2014, when the consultation responses would be considered before a final decision was made. It was proposed that special schools, pupil referral units and nursery schools would receive an allocation equivalent to that of a primary school and that comments on this should be fed back through the consultation process .

Resolved

That the options for consultation and related arrangements relating to the allocation of dedicated school grant reserve in 2015/16, as indicated above, be noted.

10. Effectiveness of Family Support Workers for 2 Year Olds in Children's Centres and Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector Nurseries

It was reported that the Budget Working Group would be giving further consideration to this matter with a report back to a subsequent meeting of this Forum.

11. Pensnett Site Disposal Update

An oral update was given on this item with particular reference to the retention on site of the sports facility, given its funding using lottery monies and proposals for a post-16 support facility for persons with learning difficulties.

Arising from the comments made and in response to a query, it was stated that existing providers had not been consulted on the proposals in relation to the post-16 facility and arising from a question regarding the need for a closer relationship between the closure of a school and the re-use of the site or its sale, it was stated that the need for this was recognised.

Resolved

That the comments made in relation to the Pensnett Site Disposal Update be noted.

12. Union Facilities Time

It was reported that further consideration had been given, as requested, by the Budget Working Group to this matter and that at their recent meeting, further information had been submitted but also additional information requested on particular aspects of this matter. Further consideration would be given to this issue at the meeting of the Budget Working Group to be held in September with a report back to a subsequent meeting of this Forum.

Resolved

That the information reported on be noted.

13. Schools Forum Proposed Meetings 2014/15 Academic Year

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on a schedule of proposed meeting dates for the 2014/15 Academic Year. Appendix A to the report also set out details of proposed items to be discussed at meetings of the Forum together with agenda setting dates and dates of the Budget Working Group.

Resolved

That approval be given to the holding of meetings of Schools Forum on the following dates:-

23rd September, 2014
21st October, 2014
25th November, 2014
16th December, 2014
27th January, 2015
24th February, 2015
24th March, 2015
2nd June, 2015
7th July, 2015

all meetings to commence at 6.00 p.m. and be held at Saltwells Educational Development Centre and that the other details contained in Appendix A be noted.

14. Attendance at Forum Meetings

In view of the fact that this meeting of the Forum was nearly inquorate concerns were expressed at non-attendance by members at Forum meetings. It was considered that there was a need for persons appointed to attend meetings of the Forum or if they could not attend, to arrange for a substitute to attend.

15. Provision of a Précis Version of Matters Considered at Forum Meetings

A comment was made that approximately two years ago consideration had been given to the provision of a brief précis note in layman's language regarding matters considered at Forum meetings so that this could be made available to people in the borough.

Arising from the comments made, it was considered that it would be useful for this to be pursued and the Children's Services Finance Manager indicated that consideration will be given to pursuing this.

The meeting ended at 7.20 p.m.

CHAIR