

## MINUTES OF DUDLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2015 at 6.00 pm  
at Saltwells Education Development Centre,  
Bowling Green Road, Netherton, Dudley

### PRESENT:-

Mr L Ridney - Chair

Mr K Bate, Mrs J Belcher, Mr J Conway, Mr C Derham, Mrs S Hannaway, Mrs N Jones, Mrs J King, Mr M Moody, Ms P Rogers, Mrs H Ruffles, Mrs M Stowe, Mr D Ward and Mrs G Withers.

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

Mrs P Sharratt – Interim Director of Children’s Services

### Officers

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

#### 64 Introductions by the Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular welcoming Mr Moody to his first meeting as a Forum member.

#### 65 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mrs A Garratt, Mr J Kelleher, Mr P Kilbride, Mr B Patterson, Mr P Nesbitt, Mr B Oakley, Mr N Shaw, Mrs R Wylie and Councillor T Crumpton.

#### 66 Appointment of a Substitute

It was noted that Mrs L Jeynes-Bate had been appointed to serve in place of Mr P Nesbitt for this meeting of the Forum only.

67 Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting of the Schools Forum held on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2014, as circulated at the meeting, be approved as a correct record and signed.

68 Matters Arising from the Minutes

In relation to minute no. 57, the Unions and Professional Associations representative reiterated the comments made at the previous meeting in relation to the reduction of facility arrangements for Trade Unions and further stated that there was a threat that the level of support currently provided could not be maintained.

The Chair acknowledged that discussions in relation to this issue were still on-going.

69 Schools Reserves and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Assurance Testing

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the DfE annual assurance testing in relation to the deployment of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and Schools surplus balances.

In presenting the report, the Children's Services Finance Manager stated that it was not anticipated that Dudley would be in breach of the DfE assurance testing criteria for the 2013/14 financial outturn, however there were potential areas of concern within the 2014/15 financial year.

In referring to appendix A of the report submitted, additional information was circulated to members at the meeting that had been obtained from the relevant Schools, at the request of the Head Teachers Consultative Forum (HTCF) – Budget Working Group, addressing the reasons for the surplus balances. Reasons for the surplus balances held at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 included contingency funds for potential equal pay claims and capital projects which were either ongoing or had been completed during the current financial year.

Arising from questions raised by a Primary School Head Teacher and the Chair in relation to on-going capital projects, the Children's Services Finance Manager agreed to ascertain as to whether part-payments could be made for capital works that were currently in progress or that payment for completed projects was paid before March 2015, to reduce some of the schools surplus balances.

Resolved

- (i) That the report submitted on the outcome of the 2013/14 DSG assurance testing and the likelihood of the 2014/15 testing result being adverse in relation to the deployment of the Dedicated Schools Grant and Schools surplus balances, be noted.
- (ii) That a further position update report be submitted to the Forum in the Summer.

70 Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Process 2015/16

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted to provide an update on the 2015/16 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget process.

The Children's Services Finance Manager presented the report in detail, referring members to paragraphs of specific importance and stated that further reports on the central expenditure budget allocation for schools would be submitted to the Forum in February and March 2015 for approval.

Reference was made to the Planned Place Return element of the process and the Children's Services Finance Manager confirmed that the Education Funding Agency's (EFA) approach had differed for the 2015/16 academic year to previous years in that they only invited exceptional cases for additional high needs place funding.

In referring to Table 1 of the report submitted outlining Dudley's exceptional planned place return for September 2015, the Children's Services Finance Manager confirmed that the EFA had accepted only one of the requested place changes which was the request to increase places at Pens Meadow Special School from 63 to 103. It was further stated that although there was no formal appeal process in relation to the high needs exceptional cases, the Local Authority could submit continued concerns to the EFA by 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2015 for consideration, which in this instance Dudley planned to do.

A copy of Dudley's Local Authority Funding Reform Proforma, submitted to the EFA on 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2015 was circulated to members at the meeting.

Following the detailed presentation of the Funding Reform Proforma and in response to a question raised by an Academy representative, the Senior Principal Accountant confirmed that benchmarking information with other Authorities would be available in three or four months time once all proforma's had been collated by the EFA, but from previous years comparisons Dudley's amount paid for basic pupil entitlement was the highest compared to north regional and statistical neighbouring authorities whilst the deprivation allocation was the lowest. Therefore it was agreed last year, following consultation, that deprivation allocations would be increased.

The Senior Principal Accountant also confirmed that School budgets would be circulated shortly outlining the full breakdown of allocations.

Arising from a question raised in relation to the proposed 66% increase payable for Copy Right Licensing, the Children's Services Finance Manager stated that no further information had been provided by the EFA in relation to this matter and therefore was unable to provide clarification of the reasons for the increase.

Resolved

- (i) That the information contained in the report submitted, be noted.
- (ii) That the Local Authority's Funding Reform proforma submitted to the Education Funding Agency on 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2015, as circulated at the meeting, be endorsed.
- (iii) That further Dedicated School Grant update reports be submitted to Schools Forum in February and March 2015, incorporating the central expenditure budget allocations for Schools Forum approval.

#### 71 Schools with Licensed Deficits Monitoring Update

The Senior Principal Accountant gave a verbal update on the latest financial monitoring position for the Coseley School.

She referred to the information provided at the last meeting in that the School had projected an overspend of £42,000 in addition to its licensed deficit of £283,480. As at the 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2014 the school had confirmed that they would end the financial year with a balanced budget.

It was further stated that work had commenced with the School on its expenditure budget for 2015/16.

Resolved

That the verbal update provided on the latest financial monitoring position for the Coseley School, be noted.

72 School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2014

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the latest amendments to the School Finance Regulations as advised by Central Government.

In presenting the report the Senior Principal Accountant made particular reference to the four key points referred to in paragraph 6 of the report submitted.

Resolved

- (i) That the latest amendments to the School Finance Regulations 2014, be noted.
- (ii) That the actions put in place by the Local Authority as required by the amended Regulations, as summarised in Appendix A to the report submitted, be noted.

73 Schools Forum Constitution

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the revised Schools Forum Constitution effective from 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2015.

The Children's Services Finance Manager advised that during the formalisation of the constitution through Dudley's democratic process, Legal Services had advised on two further changes in relation to paragraphs 43 and 55 of the document.

Resolved

That the revised Schools Forum Constitution, as attached as Appendix A to the report submitted, effective by the statutory deadline of 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2015, be noted and endorsed.

74 Matters Arising November 2014

- (a) Funding for disadvantaged Two Year Olds – Sufficiency and Take-up data

The Interim Director of Children's Services gave a verbal update on Dudley's position in relation to the 'Time for Twos' initiative.

She stated that as at September 2014 Dudley's take-up had reached 33%, which was below the national average take-up of 55%. She confirmed that neighbouring authorities had achieved a higher take-up of the initiative, with Warwickshire exceeding the national average.

It was further stated that due to the low take-up in Dudley, this had prompted the DfE to visit and make suggestions to encourage take-up within the borough; a number of which had been put into action and a slight increase to 39% had been reached. It was stated that a number of eligible applications had been received during January 2015, but parents had not taken up on their places, which had seen the take-up percentage drop to 30%.

It was considered that there was currently sufficient provision in the borough to accommodate all eligible children but that these places were not always in the right areas.

Following the verbal presentation, the Early Years Provider representative stated that some providers did not have the capacity or places to offer eligible children and were currently turning people away.

In responding, the Interim Director of Children's Services confirmed that there were pockets within the borough that had reached their capacity and that local schools were also being approached and encouraged to take on the initiative.

Concerns were also raised in relation to providers expanding their capacity to accommodate additional children and the sustainability of the provision, as it was considered to be a potentially volatile sector.

The Interim Director of Children's Services reiterated that work was actively taking place to encourage parents to take-up the initiative and confirmed that a further update would be provided to a future meeting of the Forum.

(b) Family Support Workers in Early Years settings

The Acting Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education Services) gave a verbal update in relation to Schools Forum request for a further report on Family Support Workers and the provisions and services that they provided.

He stated that two Children's Centre Strategic Managers had attended the HTCF-Budget Working Group meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2015 to discuss member's issues and concerns. Particular concerns were made in relation to the impact the service had on families that were relatively new to the Country and discussions were had in relation to the top slicing of funding allocated to Family Support Workers and if it would be considered beneficial for the full amount of the 'Times for Two' funding to be allocated to providers due to the poor take up of the scheme.

Resolved

- (i) That the verbal information presented in relation to funding for disadvantage two year olds and family support workers in Early Years settings, be noted.
- (ii) That further updates be provided to a future meeting of the Forum.

74 Dates of Future Meetings

Resolved

That the dates of future meetings be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.10pm

CHAIR