

MINUTES OF DUDLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

Tuesday, 24th February, 2015 at 6.00 pm
at Saltwells Education Development Centre,
Bowling Green Road, Netherton, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Mr L Ridley – Chair

Mrs R Wylie – Vice-Chair

Mrs J Belcher, Mr J Conway, Mr C Derham, Mrs A Garratt, Mrs A Hannaway, Mrs J Kings, Mr B Oakley, Mr B Patterson, Ms P Rogers, Mrs H Ruffles, Mr N Shaw, 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

Councillor T Crumpton – Cabinet Member for Children's Services & Lifelong Learning

Officers

Mrs A Callear (Divisional Lead - Family Support), Mr I Curnow (Divisional Lead - Commissioning and Procurement), Mr H Powell (Acting Assistant Director - Education Services) (Directorate of People Services); Mrs K Cocker (Children's Services Finance Manager), Mrs S Coates (Senior Principal Accountant), Mrs L Jones-Moore (Principal Accountant) and Miss H Shepherd (Democratic Services Officer), Directorate of Resources and Transformation.

76 Introductions by the Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting

77 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mrs N Jones, Mr J Kelleher, Mr P Kilbride, Mr M Moody, Mr P Nesbitt and Mrs M Stowe.

78 Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting of the Schools Forum held on 27th January, 2015, be approved as a correct record and signed.

79 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Arising from a request for an update in relation to minute no. 68 and the reduction of Trade Union Facility arrangements, the Children's Services Finance Manager commented that this item formed part of the De-delegations options for 2015/16 that were agreed at Schools Forum in December, 2014 and therefore no update from the Local Authority on that matter was necessary. However, an update from the Trade Union representative may be provided at a future meeting concluding their own findings as raised at the January meeting.

80 Dudley Grid for Learning (DGfL) Programme

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted in respect of the Dudley Grid for Learning programme.

The Divisional Lead - Commissioning and Procurement, presented the report and referred to the consultation document that had previously been circulated to all Schools and provided Members with an overview of the background behind the Dudley Grid for Learning 3 contract.

He referred to feedback submitted by Dudley Schools, from the consultation, which indicated that Schools valued the current service and would be happy to update the offer, particularly as the contract had been remodelled to provide a core with modular options that could be purchased and adapted to meet each school's individual need.

It was stated that no costs for the additional modular options had been determined, but that it was anticipated that these would be confirmed before the end of March, 2015 in a catalogue being produced by RM Education.

In response to a question raised by a Primary School Head Teacher, the Children's Services Finance Manager confirmed that the new pupil unit rate would commence from February 2016 and that Schools were advised to set a DGfL budget for 2015/16 equivalent to the budget that was set for 2014/15.

The Chair raised concerns of the difficulties he had experienced accessing the site since the last refresh as he did not have a DGfL email address and requested that help and support contact details were made readily available. The Divisional Lead - Commissioning and Procurement agreed to seek a solution to address the issue.

Councillor Crumpton commended Officers on the continued work undertaken to ensure the project was implemented in all Schools.

A Secondary School Head Teacher referred to the new offer which he considered to be an improvement to the previous core, but expressed his concerns that some of the functions being offered were also part of the current facility and that problems experienced remained unresolved. He expressed his dissatisfaction in the way that the previous refresh had been installed at his School and of the disruption that had been caused to a number of schools in the borough and requested reassurances that similar problems would not be experienced in the future.

The Divisional Lead - Commissioning and Procurement commented that the reasons that some Schools had experienced problems were partly due to the complexity and diversity of some school systems that had developed beyond the original DGfL specification; the scale of the infra-structure change and the aggravations with the internet connection which was out of the Local Authorities control. He further commented that not all Schools had had the same experience and assured Members that the core was fit for purpose and that Schools experiences would be closely monitored. It was noted that whilst no large scale refresh would be undertaken in the future, further hardware upgrades would be required between now and 2021.

A Primary School Governor representative commented that she had seen both good and bad experiences but considered the relationship between Schools, DGfL and RM Education to be good and should continue to be developed.

Resolved

That the Dudley Grid for Learning programme offer to Dudley schools from 1st February 2016, as supported by the DGfL Steering Board on 5th February, 2015, and the core service per pupil unit rates payable by schools, as detailed in Table 1 of the report submitted, be noted.

81 Education Funding for Disadvantaged Two Year Olds – Sufficiency and Take Up Data

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the sufficiency and take-up of two year old places for early year's education.

In presenting the report, the Children's Services Finance Manager referred to paragraphs in relation to the financial implications and funding provided by the DfE for the implementation of the initiative.

In responding to a question raised, the Children's Services Finance Manager confirmed that the under-spend from the funding would be incorporated into the central DSG reserve fund, which was not ring-fenced funding and could be allocated to any services as prescribed by the Schools Finance Regulations. However, Members were advised that as the funding for disadvantaged two year olds in 2015/16 would be based upon participation and the take-up figures from January 2015, funding allocated by the DfE would be significantly reduced. As the Local Authority was continuing to promote the initiative it was considered important to earmark some reserve to make-up any deficit costs in increased take-up after April 2015, which would not be funded by the DfE until the Autumn 2015.

The Interim Director of Children's Services referred to her recent meeting with the DfE and reiterated that the Government would like the initiative to succeed and encouraged the Local Authority to exercise flexibility and creativity in offering the provision.

The Divisional Lead – Family Support Officer gave an overview of paragraphs 10 to 23 of the report submitted and referred to the sufficiency of two year olds places within the borough and the options available to encourage further providers; how the initiative was marketed and promoted to parents; feedback received from parents as to why they had chosen not to take-up the initiative and the difficulties current providers had experienced and how data collection would be recorded.

Following the presentation, representatives and officers acknowledged that the lack of providers and places available in pockets within the Borough had had a detrimental impact on the take-up of the initiative. The Divisional Lead – Family Support Officer commented that this was an area that required improvement. It was stated that at the time the initiative was implemented it was considered that there would be sufficient provision within the Borough, however due to the poor take-up an exercise had been undertaken to ascertain where there were gaps in sufficient provision providers.

A representative raised concerns in relation to the cost implications for providers in comparison to the £4.50 per hour funding that was available and paid to providers for the service. It was considered that the funding was insufficient to cover additional overheads incurred.

Concerns were also raised in relation to the providers that had been rated less than good by Ofsted and who were now being considered to be used to accommodate the shortfall in provision. It was also considered important to avoid compromising a child's start in education in order to attain required targets.

The Interim Director of Children's Services agreed with and noted the comments made and suggested that alternative ways of providing the provision should be considered and the possibility of incentives to encourage new providers be made available.

In referring to the discussions at the Head Teachers Consultative Forum – Budget Working Group (HTCF-BWG), the Children's Services Finance Manager proposed that the funding paid to providers be increased from £4.50 per hour to £4.89 per hour from April 2015. It was noted that the outcome of the increase would result in the 39p, retained from the DfE allocation to ensure family support workers and early intervention remained Central to the Dudley Offer, would be removed and need to be funded centrally. The HTCF-BWG suggested that funding be provided from the DSG Central Reserve budget for the family support workers provision to continue for an initial period of six months, subject to a detailed report being submitted to Schools Forum in June 2015, addressing members concerns regarding the measurable impact the service had on children and families in the Borough.

In response to a question raised by the Chair, the Divisional Lead – Family Support confirmed that some of the Children Centres and Children Centre staff within the Borough were now providing 'Time for Twos' provision and that details of those particular centres and the number of children using the provision at those locations would be provided at the March meeting of the Forum.

The Interim Director of Children's Services also stated that creativity was required when assessing how the provision could be delivered and suggested that Stay and Play sessions could be an alternative option to explore.

In response to a question raised by the Special School Representative, the Children's Services Finance Manager stated that funding for the family support workers, initially for a period of six months, could be made from the 'Time for Twos' under-spend which would be incorporated into the DSG Central Reserve fund or from an under-spend in the Higher Needs Block.

Arising from a discussion in relation to whether £4.89 per hour was sufficient for providers, the Children's Services Finance Manager advised members that allocated funding would be committed to paying the increased amount for as long as the initiative was in force and should there be an increase in take up of the provision and the Council were paying above the allocation granted by the DfE, the deficit would have to be subsidised from elsewhere. Therefore one-off funding solutions would be preferred than to pay over the £4.89 per hour.

A Primary School representative requested that if incentives were made available to providers in relation to start-up costs, that clear and transparent criteria should be established to ensure that funding was allocated fairly and evenly across the Borough.

It was further requested by a Primary School representative that support be made available for those children who had been disadvantaged due to the lack of 'Time for Twos' provision available within their preferred area.

Resolved

- (i) That the progress to date in respect of the DfE's early years education funding for disadvantaged two year olds initiative, with particular reference to the sufficiency and take up of places to date and associated funding position, be noted.
- (ii) That a further report, detailing the finalised data; confirming the particular Children's Centres that were providing 'Time for Twos' provision and the number of children that had taken-up the provision at those Centre's, be submitted to the Forum meeting in March 2015.
- (iii) That the unit rate per hour paid to providers be increased to £4.89 for 2015/16, subject to a further review in 2016/17.

82 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Implementation Funding

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Implementation, the future DfE changes and the latest financial funding profile.

The Acting Assistant Director (Education Services) presented the report and referred to paragraphs of specific importance.

Arising from a question raised by the Special School representative, the Acting Assistant Director (Education Services) confirmed that staffing figures for the service included three case workers and additional administrative time.

In response to a further question raised, the Acting Assistant Director (Education Services) confirmed that further consideration would be given to the allocation of funding to those Schools that provided an onsite Special Education facility.

Resolved

- (i) That the Special Educational Needs and Disability implementation and latest financial funding profile, be noted.
- (ii) That the Local Authority's DfE's consultation submission for funding children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability, be noted.

83 Universal Infant Free School Meals

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted to provide Members with an update on the Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) grants for 2014/15.

Arising from the presentation of the report, a Secondary School Governor referred to the number of Schools that had been disadvantaged from the implementation of the UIFSM scheme and whether the Local Authority had any plans or contingencies to help alleviate some of the capital funding pressure. The Interim Director of Children's Services commented that all available monies had been utilised and that no further capital funding was available.

Resolved

That the information contained in the report on Universal Infant Free School Meals, both revenue funding and expenditure for Dudley Schools and the outcome of the recent capital bid submitted, in respect of two Dudley maintained schools, be noted.

84 Dedicated Schools Grant Planning Process 2015/16 - Update

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget planning process and to agree the Central Expenditure budgets for 2015/16.

The Children's Services Finance Manager presented the report and made particular reference to Table 2 and Table 3 of the report submitted. She referred to the central spend recorded in both tables individually and representatives made comments and responses were given as follows:-

- Equal pay back-pay - The Children's Services Finance Manager suggested that the £1.5m that had previously been set aside as an Equal Pay loan facility for Voluntary Aided and Foundation Schools, now be incorporated into the expenditure to enable eligible Schools to draw upon the funds, if required, subject to an agreement that the monies would be paid back with an interest percentage applied, to enable schools to eliminate any outstanding equal pay claims.
- Places in independent schools for non-SEN pupils (RBPI) - In response to a question raised by a Primary Head Teacher in relation to places in independent schools for non-SEN pupils, the Children's Services Finance Officer stated that there was currently a high demand and an increase in pupils using the facility with variable provision costs.
- Early years expenditure (RBRM, RBPS, RBRP) - Members raised concerns on aspects within the Early years expenditure heading and considered it to be unreasonable to make a decision on the expenditure without fully understanding the services and benefits that would be provided and therefore requested that a detailed report on the early years foundation stage advice team functions, teachers deployed in the children's centres, and the early years pupil premium and free schools meals entitlement co-ordination be submitted to the next HTCF-BWG meeting, with a recommendation from the HTCF-BWG presented to the Forum for final approval, at the next meeting.

Members were also reminded of the proposal referred to at Agenda Item No. 7 – Education Funding for Disadvantage Two Year Olds – Sufficiency and Take-Up Data, in that funding for the family support workers provision, retained centrally, would be provided from the DSG Central Reserve budget for an initial period of six months, subject to a detailed report being submitted to Schools Forum in June 2015 addressing members concerns raised on the measurable impact the service had on children and families in the Borough.

- Contribution to combined budgets - Members challenged the reason for the continued funding of the Carbon Reduction Commitment through the above expenditure, in light of discussions at a previous HTCF-BWG meeting. The Acting Assistant Director (Education Services) agreed to refer back to the minutes from that meeting as he recalled a lengthy debate on the issue but not that a decision had been made to cease payment of the provision and would therefore report back to the Forum in March 2015.

Representatives then voted on each item of expenditure, as indicated below:-

Table 2 – 2015/16 Central Expenditure Budgets – No Restrictions on Value

Central spend on	Value 2015/16	Decision
Funding for significant pre-16 pupil growth	£500,000	Approved
Equal pay back-pay	£1.5m	Approved
Places in independent schools for non-SEN pupils (RBPI)	£400,300	Approved
Early years expenditure - £1,124,300 (RBRM, RBPS, RBR)		
• Early Years Contingency	£75,000	Approved
• Early Years Budgets in respect of delegated service items	£58,000	Approved
• Early Years Foundation Advice	£472,000	Deferred to the next meeting of the forum
• Early Years Pupil Premium and Free School Meals Entitlement co-ordination	£68,000	Deferred to the next meeting of the forum
• Teacher supporting Children Centres	£120,000	Deferred to the next meeting of the forum
• Family Support for two year olds	£330,000	Approved 6/12 th of £330,000 funding, to cover the period to September 2015 from the DSG Reserve, subject to a review and detailed report being submitted to Schools Forum in June 2015 based on the impact assessment.
Carbon reduction commitment (RBTO)	£6,700	Approved

Table 3 – 2015/16 Central Expenditure Budgets – Restricted to Cash Limit of 2014/15 Expenditure

Central Spend on	Value for 2015/16	Decision
Admissions	£330,400	Approved
Servicing Schools forum	£13,095	Approved
Capital expenditure funded from revenue	£66,000	Approved
Contribution to combined budgets - £333,000		
• Astley Burf	£10,000	Approved
• School Visits	£31,000	Approved
• Carbon Reduction Commitment	£65,000	Deferred for further clarification at the next meeting of the Forum.
• DART	£42,000	Approved
• Anti-bullying	£23,000	Approved
• Place planning	£33,000	Approved
• Safeguarding	£64,000	Approved
• Information Governance	£34,000	Approved
• Statistical work	£31,000	Approved
Schools budget centrally funded termination of employment costs	£71,200	Approved
Schools budget funded prudential borrowing costs	None	Approved

Resolved

- (i) That the 2015/16 Central Expenditure Budgets – No restrictions on value, as detailed in table 2 of the report submitted, be approved as listed above.
- (ii) That the 2015/16 Central Expenditure Budgets – restricted to cash limit of 2014/15 expenditure, as detailed in table 3 of the report submitted, be approved as listed above.
- (iii) That the final de-delegations budgets for 2015/16, as detailed in table 4 of the report submitted, be noted.

- (iv) That a detailed report on the Early Years functions and Children's Centres be submitted to the next Head Teachers Consultative Forum – Budget Working Group meeting, and that a recommendation from that meeting be presented to the next meeting of Schools Forum for approval.
- (v) That clarification be provided to the next meeting of Schools Forum on the continued expenditure to Carbon Reduction Commitment, in order that Schools Forum can vote on a decision as to whether this item should continue to be funded through the 2015/16 Central Expenditure Budgets – restricted to cash limit of 2014/15 expenditure.
- (vi) That 6/12th of the £330,000 annual funding for the family support workers provision, retained centrally, to cover the period April 2015 to September 2015, from the DSG Central Reserve, be approved, subject to a detailed report being submitted to Schools Forum in June 2015 on the impact of the provision of family support workers, supporting 'Time for Two's' early education, for Schools Forum to determine whether the initiative is to be supported after September 2015.

85 Dates of Future Meetings

Resolved

That the dates of future meetings be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.30pm

CHAIR