

**Minutes of Dudley Schools Forum  
Tuesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2023 at 6.00pm  
On Microsoft Teams**

**Present:**

Mrs J Belcher, Mrs J Morgan, Mrs R Cox, Mrs V Howard, Mr M Kelay, Mr S Lanckham, Mr P Leyshon, Ms L Maskell, Mrs E O'Brien, Mr T Reid, Mr B Roe, Ms E Stanton, Miss F Sumner, Mr K Tranter, Miss A Ward, Mrs S Watson and Mrs A Webb

**Non-Voting Officers:**

C Driscoll (Director of Children's Services), S Thirlway (Service Director Education, SEND and Family Solutions), C Ludwig (Finance Manager), J Wilson (Principal Accountant), R Marsh, (People and Inclusion - Business Partner) and G Gray (Democratic Services Officer)

**Also in Attendance:**

Councillor K Lewis (Chair for Children's Services Select Committee)

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**1 Election of Chair for the 2023/24 Academic Year**

**Resolved**

That Mrs J Belcher be elected as Chair of Dudley Schools Forum for the 2023/24 Academic Year.

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2 **Appointment of Vice-Chair for the 2023/24 Academic Year**

**Resolved**

That Mrs J Morgan be elected as Vice-Chair of Dudley Schools Forum for the 2023/24 Academic Year.

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3 **Introductions by the Chair**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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4 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mr C Finnerty, Mr T Harris, Mrs S Parkes and M Palfreyman (Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion).

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5 **Substitute Members**

There were no substitute Members appointed for this meeting of the Forum.

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6 **Minutes**

**Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, be approved as a correct record.

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7 **Head Teachers Consultative Forum – Budget Working Group Verbal Feedback**

Mr S Lanckham, Academy Member Representative, provided feedback on the discussions held at the previous Head Teachers Consultative Forum – Budget Working Group (HTCF-BWG) meeting advising that the new term had started and that Local Authority Headteacher Meetings had taken place two weeks ago, which had a significant attendance with most schools and trusts being represented.

It was noted that there had been an improvement of school attendance and the number of suspensions and exclusions had been decreased, which had been the main cause of concern across the Local Authority and Schools.

The Budget Working Group were advised that Children's Services were undergoing a redesign based on the Family Safeguarding model, that Phase 1 had been completed in July 2023 and that Dudley would be the 19<sup>th</sup> Local Authority to implement this. It was advised that R Wright (Childrens Social Care Service Manager) had attended Head Teacher meetings to advise of the new ways of working, which was greatly received by Head Teachers and provided a clear line of communication into the team.

It was reported that Phase 2 of the redesign was currently open to consultation and would close on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2023. Changes were planned for Education, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Family Solutions and as part of this, Connexions and Education Psychology would move into the Education Team.

It was advised that the new Child Friendly Dudley Local Authority strategy had been launched and was being led by H Walton (Child Friendly Dudley Programme Lead). The Child Friendly Dudley Local Authority strategy was a Borough wide initiative to ensure the life chances of children were at the forefront of Dudley's Local Authority priorities and future planning.

Mr S Lanckham reported that there had been changes to Safeguarding and Keeping Children Safe in Education, that this information had been shared with schools and that updated training packages would be available as part of the safeguarding support to schools.

It was reported that further work was being undertaken to increase the number of SEND bases on mainstream school sites and that a further round of commissioning would be taking place during this academic year.

It was noted that the Deputy Head Teacher Conference would be taking place on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2023 at Himley Hall, and that over 60 schools would be represented. The Primary and Special Headteachers Conference was planned for 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2023.

It was advised that schools with Dudley Catering Services would be moved to new providers due to the Dudley Catering Services being ceased on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2024.

In regard to the Education Strategy, the Budget Working Group were advised of the six key themes of the new simplified strategy.

An update had been provided at the Budget Working Group regarding the Virtual School and it was reported that A Wright had retired, and that E Thomas would now take over as Head Teacher of the Virtual School.

It was noted that M Wilson (Community Safety Officer) would be offering free training to schools, pupils, and parents on prevent radicalisation and other social community issues.

It was reported that there had been a rise in prevalence of Covid 19 within schools and that new guidance had been issued from the Health Protection Team, which had been shared with all schools.

The Dudley Community Toothbrushing Scheme, which provided free toothbrushes for all of Key Stage 1 children to tackle issues of poor oral health following Covid had been carried out.

It was noted that the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ) to support and understand the lives children and young people lead, had been undertaken.

The Budget Working group were advised of the Health and Wellbeing Market place event, which was taking place on 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2023 at Saltwells together with several stakeholders who would be present to discuss a variety of health and support networks. It was also advised that the Poverty Proofing the School Day Pilot would be undertaken, which would be working together with children in the North East and 8 primary schools to run a pilot project to understand poverty for children and families.

## **Resolved**

That the feedback provided be noted.

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## **8 Schools Forum Membership**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on an update in respect of Schools Forum membership.

The Democratic Services Officer presented the report submitted, and in doing so, reported that Governor Support had commenced an election process for one primary school Head Teacher, together with information circulated to fill the remaining vacancies as outlined in Appendix A. The outcomes of the elections would be presented to the Forum in November, 2023.

## **Resolved**

That the updated position in respect of the membership of Dudley's Schools Forum, as referred to in Appendix A of the report submitted, be noted.

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### **9 Growth Fund Methodology 2024/25**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted seeking approval from Schools Forum to continue to apply the existing eligibility criteria and funding methodology to funding allocated through a growth fund contingency for 2024/25.

The Finance Manager presented the report submitted, and in doing so, advised that a further report would be submitted to the meeting of the Schools Forum in January, 2024, outlining the actual allocation for 2023/24 and the amount of growth fund allocated for 2024/25.

The Finance Manager referred to the criteria for additional funding intended for mainstream schools who increased their published admission numbers (PAN) at the request of the Local Authority as set out in Appendix A of the report submitted.

It was advised that the intended funding would support schools with additional pupils to meet the funding lag between pupils starting in September of an academic year and that further funding would be received through the formula in April for maintained schools or the following September for Academy schools.

It was reported that funding would be received from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) through the formula for growth funding and it was deemed that the allocation would be sufficient to fund the additional needs. It was advised that unused funding for 2024/25 would be added to the Schools Specific Contingency balance.

It was noted that the methodology proposed reflected the reconciliation of pupils leaving in year 6 or year 11, the intake of pupils in Reception or year 7, the additional pupils that were coming into school who were not funded through the formula immediately and that additional funding would only be granted to schools where the number of additional pupils were greater than 10.

It was advised that the funding would be restricted to a maximum amount per pupil equivalent to 7/12ths of the minimum per pupil funding, which was specified within the methodology as set out in Appendix A of the report submitted.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted be noted.
- (2) That the eligibility criteria and funding methodology to be applied to funds allocated from the growth fund contingency in 2024/25, be approved.

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## 10 **Trade Union Facility Time – Pooled Funding Arrangement**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted regarding an update on the Trade Union Facility Time Pooled Funding Arrangement in schools, to highlight the current funding and spend and seeking approval from Schools Forum for the carry forward of any surplus funding.

The People and Inclusion – Business Manager presented the report submitted and in doing so advised that a new charging model relating to the provision of Trade Union Facility Time through Dudley's Pooled Funding Arrangement was approved at a meeting of the Schools Forum in January, 2020 to reduce costs in line with statistical neighbours.

It was advised that the forecast of the financial position at the end of the financial year would be in a deficit of up to £16,000, however, due to current vacancies of the National Education Union (NEU), the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), there would be a saving of £1,900 to cover the shortfall for the current financial year. The unions were seeking to appoint replacement representatives, which would then present a forecasted deficit. Therefore, it was requested that any surplus funding be rolled forward to address the majority of the forecasted 2023/24 deficit.

Reference was made to Appendix 1 of the report submitted, which outlined the joint Trade Union Business Plan and the activities undertaken to support members over the past 12 months.

Members were referred to comparisons made with statistical neighbours, and it was advised that, of the 7 statistical neighbours that reported on the percentage of cost spent on facility time, Dudley was joint third highest in cost at 0.10%, however, it was noted that this percentage sat below the midpoint of the range.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted be noted.
- (2) That the Schools Forum to continue to observe the 'in principle' agreement reached in 2020 to de-delegation and buy back, be approved.
- (3) That the comparison, when viewed against statistical neighbours, of the percentage of pay spent on Dudley's trade union facility time, as set out in paragraph 24 of the report submitted, be noted.
- (4) That the request to roll-forward any surplus from the current financial year, to the financial year 2023/24, in order to mitigate the forecasted deficit, be approved.
- (5) That the content of the Joint Union (NAHT/ASCL/NEU) letter as set out in Appendix 4 of the report submitted, requesting that the Council maintains its pooled funding arrangement, that provides access for academies, be noted.

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## 11 **Directorate of Children's Services – Verbal Update**

The Director of Children's Services provided an update and advised of the financial pressure and concerns facing all Local Authorities. Reference was made to the Section 114 notices issued to Birmingham City Council and concerns that had been raised. The Director of Children's Services reassured representatives that Dudley were not within that position of issuing a notice. However, it was noted that Dudley were a low reserve authority with low spending and that Dudley were experiencing significant demand pressures within Children's Services and the Council as a whole.

It was advised that there were significant concerns within the High Needs Block deficit and that the demand had increased considerably as a result of not being able to manage with current resources available.

Members were advised that finance was being received from the Department of Education (DfE) statutory override on the High Needs Block, which did not count against the Council's budget position, however, the statutory override was due to end in March 2026 and that there would be significant challenges should the override not continue after March, 2026.

The Director of Children's Services commented that significant work would need to be carried out in the forthcoming years in relation to meeting the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

It was reported that partners across the system were meeting on Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2023 to carry out work on self-evaluation and starting work to prepare the new SEND strategy which was due in 2024.

It was noted that work would continue regarding delivering best value in the SEND programme and a lot of work would be underway within the next six months.

### **Resolved**

That the verbal update on the Directorate of Children's Services, be noted.

The meeting ended at 6.30pm

CHAIR