

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 19 JANUARY 2021

PRESENT: -

Maintained School Members:

| | |
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| Rhian Cockwell | Primary Headteacher |
| Kate Higham | Special Headteacher |
| Lindsey Hull, | Pupil Referral Unit |
| Alison Lowe | Primary Headteacher |
| Ray Williams | Primary Governor |

Academy Members

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| Bob Buckley | Mainstream Academy |
| Gary Evans | Mainstream Academy |
| Fiona Godfrey | Mainstream Academy |
| James Povoas | Mainstream Academy |
| Karen Pyman | Mainstream Academy |
| Jackie Smith | Special Academy |

Non-School Representatives

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| Andrew Henstridge | Clifton Diocese |
| Margaret Clark | Diocese of Bristol |
| Jo Morris Golds | Early Years |
| Debbie Brown | Trade Unions |

Officers:

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| Annette Perrington | Director: Inclusion and Achievement |
| Gareth Cheal | Head of Access and School Partnerships |
| Dawn Sexstone | Head of Finance, Children Services |
| Danielle Maundrell | Strategic Commissioner, Early Years |
| Jo Goodwin | Interim SEND Lead, Education |

Also in attendance: Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills.

Apologies for absence were received from Nick Capstick, Sherryl Bareham and Clive Zimmerman.

20. Declaration of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matter to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

21. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th December 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

22.

Public Question Time

In accordance with Standing Order 28, Mr Alastair Dixon-Patterson of Lydiard Park Academy, Swindon, submitted written questions regarding the Wellbeing for Education Grant.

The Chair thanked Mr Dixon-Patterson for his question and said that a written response had been provided and circulated to all members. Mr Dixon-Patterson requested further clarification to the responses circulated. The Director: Inclusion and Achievement responded at the meeting but due to the nature of the subject, undertook to provide an in-depth written response.

23.

2021/22 Dedicated Schools Grant Settlement - Early Years Block

The Strategic Commissioner: Early Years and Childcare submitted a report providing Schools Forum members with an update on the estimated value of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and other funding that will be available in 2021/22. She explained that there are four funding blocks in 2021/22. These were a) Schools, b) High Needs, c) Early Years and d) Central Schools Services Blocks. It was noted that the report submitted would only cover the Early Years Block.

The Strategic Commissioner: Early Years and Childcare drew attention to the 2021/22 Early Years block DSG settlement that was being revised by the Department for Education (DfE) in light of Early Years census information. It was noted that the final settlement will not be confirmed until July 2022. She advised that no increase for growth had been included within Swindon's 2 year old DSG funding and that the DfE has yet to confirm the funding rate for 3 and 4 year old provision.

Resolved – (1) That the Strategic Commissioner: Early Years and Childcare be requested to submit a report to Schools Forum on the 9th March 2021 giving an update on the DSG consultation undertaken.

(2) That further to (1) above, the Early Years Funding Settlement figures be included in the report.

24.

Schools Block and Central School Services Block update including 2021/22 DSG Settlement and Budget

The Head of Access and School Partnerships and the Head of Finance: Children Services submitted a joint report that updated members on the estimated value of the Dedicated Schools Grant ('DSG') and other funding that will be available in 2021/22. The Head of Finance: Children Services explained that there are four funding blocks in 2021/22, Schools, High Needs, Early Years and the Central Schools Services and that this report covered the Schools and Central School Services Blocks.

The Head of Finance: Children Services gave a presentation (see attached) and drew the following key issues to member's attention:

- The release of information on the Dedicated Schools Grant Settlement for 2021/22 on 17th December 2020 by the Education and Skills Funding Agency ('ESFA').
- How the Schools Block DSG 2021/22 funding can be accurately determined due to

the funding calculation being based on the October 2020 school census, multiplied by two DfE determined rates of £4,345.79 per primary pupil or £5,702.33 per secondary pupil.

- How the Central School Services Block ('CSSB') contained the funding for the Local Authority's (LA's) statutory services for all pupils in maintained schools and academies and also covered the funding for the centrally retained budgets for Admissions, Schools Forum, Travellers Children, National Copyright licences for all schools and academies and the Equal Pay annual repayments.
- Whilst the report addressed various proposals, an adjustment to the settlement figures was expected.
- An update on the DSG balances and how the DfE's grant conditions affirm that the DSG must be treated by the LA as ring-fenced funding for specific educational purposes.
- That the notional SEN calculation also includes all High Needs pupils funded by the LA irrespective of pupils having an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or not.
- That details of the 2021/22 pupil led funding calculation will be provided to March 2021 Schools Forum and that these will exclude Rates, Lump Sum and PFI allocations.
- The process of de-delegation where funding is deducted from maintained schools budgets to provide services centrally.
- Meetings were held in November 2020 to establish the local funding formula to be used to calculate 2021/22 budgets for maintained mainstream schools and mainstream academies. The proposals put forward were: (A) All pupil lead factors are paid at 100.316% of the National Funding Formula values; and (B) All pupil lead factors are paid at 100% of the National Funding Formula values and a transfer to the High Needs Block of £191.1k. Members agreed Option (A).

Following her presentation, the Head of Finance: Children Services, together with the Chair, Director: Inclusion and Achievement, and the Head of Access and School Partnership, responded to members' comments and questions in respect of the following matters:

- Budget implications for LA maintained schools due to de-delegation, particularly as the number of academies was now higher than in previous years.
- The meaning of trigger funding and how this would be allocated to assist start-up schools and those schools that have unplanned in-year pupil number increases.
- Comparison between 2021/22 and 2020/21 data for the central schools service block and that a) the increase was in line with current staffing and there were no inflationary increases for the Admissions block; b) Schools subscriptions and licences were up by 6.1k; and c) there was no increase in (i) Schools Forum administration, (ii) the Travellers' children and (iii) Equal Pay budgets.
- How the opportunity to re-finance or re-negotiate equal pay loans in light of the current low interest rate charges would be investigated.
- The robust challenge by maintained schools on the Education Function Charge (EFC) rates, particularly in addressing the effect on their budgets of the decrease in the number of maintained schools.
- How the EFC rates needed to be agreed at the meeting as the decision had to be included in the Authority Proforma Tool sent to the Education and Skills Funding Agency.
- How further discussions between the LA and the maintained schools group needs to be undertaken to review items included in the EFC.

Councillor Russell Holland, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills, updated the Forum on the current position of the general fund and the position of the Council's finances. He explained that a draft budget went to Cabinet on 2nd December 2020 and there was a budget gap of £3.8m for 2021/2022. There has been positive movement since then and an update was given at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11th January 2021. An updated budget will be submitted to the Cabinet meeting on the 3rd February 2021 for consideration and a final report will then be submitted at the Council meeting on 25th March 2021 for ratification. He advised that due to the increase in demand for Adult Social Care, coupled with Children Services, there will be a corresponding effect on Council tax.

Resolved – (1) That Schools Forum notes that:

- a) The estimated DSG balance at the end of 2020/21 is expected to be a deficit of £4.125m.
- b) Swindon expects to receive a total DSG settlement of £216.131m in 2021/22.
- c) The Notional SEN funding budget for 2021/22 is a total of £0.326m.
- d) The value of the Statutory Services for all pupils budget.

(2) That School Forum agrees:

- a) That with regards to schools formula funding factors for 2021/22, Option "A" be implemented for Primary Maintained Schools only (Option A - All pupil lead factors are paid at 100.316% of the National Funding Formula values).
- b) The following de-delegations for one year from April 2021:
 - i. Swindon Association of Primary Headteachers (SAPH) - Free School Meal eligibility administration will be charged at £4.80 per pupil in 2021/22 and is supported until 31st March 2022.
 - ii. SAPH and Association of Swindon Special Schools Headteachers - Trade Union release time will be charged at £1.25 per pupil in 2021/22 and is supported until 31st March 2022
 - iii. SAPH Maintained schools only – Social, Emotional and Mental health team will be charged at £15.40 per primary pupil in 2021/22 for the first 6 referrals and is supported until 31st March 2022.
- c) A total 2021/22 pupil growth budget of £0.479m.
- d) The Admission budget
- e) The Schools subscription and Licences budget
- f) The Schools Forum budget
- g) The Travellers Children budget
- h) The Equal Pay budget
- i) The Education Funding Charge is set at 20/21 flat rate of £17.00 maintained school per pupil rate.

(3) That, with regards to de-delegation, an update regarding the financial impact on maintained schools following the increase in the number of academies be included in a School Forum report at its meeting on 9th March 2021.

(4) That information regarding the feasibility of re-brokering equal pay loans be circulated before the next meeting of the Forum.

(5) That the Head of Finance - Children Services, be requested to add EFC as an agenda item at a meeting of the maintained schools group.

(6) That the Head of Finance - Children Services be requested to invite Kate Higham to the next meeting of the maintained schools group.

25. High Needs Block update including 2021/22 Dedicated Schools Grant Settlement and Budget

The Head of Statutory SEND Services: Children Services and the Head of Finance: Children Services submitted a joint report updating members on the estimated value of the Dedicated Schools Grant ('DSG') and other funding that will be available in 2021/22. The Head of Statutory SEND Services explained that there are four funding blocks in 2021/22, Schools, High Needs, Early Years and the Central Schools Services and that this report focused on the High Needs funding block. She explained that the report includes expenditure proposals for all High Needs block funded items including: High Needs students in Mainstream schools, Special schools, Special Resource Provisions, Alternative Provision, Post-16 and Further Education, Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools and Other Commissioned High Needs provision.

The Head of Statutory SEND Services: Children Services presented the report and drew the following key issues to member's attention:

- The 2021/22 High needs proposals reflecting a budget of £38.8m funding of £37.5m, leaving a pressure of £1.37m on the budget.
- How Swindon had a higher than national average of pupils with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP).
- Since 2015, there has been a 71% increase in requests for EHCP assessments against an annual national average increase of 10%.
- The need for special school and special resources provision for the anticipated 900 commissioned places during 2021/22.
- How the current band and supplement values had remained static since 2019/20. This reflected the financial impact of Covid on school's budget and that some schools will not be able to reflect a surplus in their budget.
- Following the LA's modelling of the 2021/22 budgets, no minimum funding guarantee had been identified.
- The LA centrally held alternative provision funding amounted to £2.95m.
- No changes to the advisory teachers high needs services were proposed for 2021/22.
- The variance in the mainstream high needs budget had resulted from the increase in specialist provision for the high needs cohort.

Following her presentation, the Head of Statutory SEND Services: Children Services, together with the Chair, responded to members' comments and questions in respect of the following matters:

- The savings to be made by the therapeutic paediatric services, particularly relating to administration fees and how resources were being better utilised to deliver services directly to children.
- The work being undertaken by the high needs sensory teachers.
- The LA support for the Inclusion Forum.
- The centrally retained high needs budgets following the move for some services to be taken back in-house by the LA, enabling improved cooperation with and access to specialists, ensuring improved service provision.
- The increase in the number of children with special needs transferring to a special school in September 2021 and how discussions were taking place with the special schools to ensure they were able to meet the increase in demand and meet the

needs of the young people.

- How, with regards to out of borough education fees, an income of £0.193m was being received from the Children's Social Care and Health general fund after criteria had been met.

Resolved – That the Head of Statutory SEND Services: Children Services, be requested to submit an update at the next meeting of the Forum on special schools and special resource provision.

26. Dedicated Schools Grant Recovery Plan

The Head of Access and School Partnerships submitted a report updating Schools Forum on the current and projected position for the Swindon Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and that it included an update on progress made by the DSG Recovery Plan Task and Finish Groups following their meetings. He explained that the report supports the SEND and Inclusion Strategy, the Written Statement of Action and that the proposals contained a link to the 3-year action plan agreed by the Strategic SEND Board. Members noted the partnership approach between parents and carers, leaders in education across all settings in Swindon, political leaders, officers and members of Schools Forum is recognised as essential to systematically address the need to achieve a balanced DSG budget position. This approach is necessary to ensure a sustainable, fair and equitable use of all budgets.

The Head of Access and School Partnerships gave a presentation (attached) and drew the following key issues to member's attention:

- The DSG funding allocation by block for 2020/21.
- That there would be an increase of £3.335m increase for the 2021/22 High Needs funding.
- A breakdown of pressures contributing to the DSG deficit.
- The successful strategic approach taken to address issues within the high needs block has resulted in increased confidence for parents, investment over the past years in special resource provision and the launch of the outreach pilot in September 2020.
- A breakdown of key activities, including their progress, 2020/21 budget and potential savings for each activity.
- Activities identified through the Task and Finish group to address in-year pressures.
- The discussion by the Task and Finish groups regarding the allocation of funding to be received following the disapplication request to the ESFA and the various options on its use to be considered by Schools Forum.
- The current success in various area by implementing a strategic approach and the actions within the five year plan to continue building on this success.

The Chair advised that this report was for information only as it was still within the consultation period and stated that this was submitted in order to be transparent in terms of sharing thoughts and processes.

The Director: Inclusion and Achievement confirmed that the activities that were presented at the meeting will form part of a diversity impact assessment and welcomed member's views regarding the proposal being recommended. She thanked those members who took part in the start and finish group meetings for their contribution in drawing up the strategic

plan and proposals for the disapplication funding.

Resolved – (1) To note that Members of Schools Forum considered and commented on changes to the recommendations for the strategic aims and priorities for the DSG Recovery Plan and the actions to deliver a balanced budget.

(2) That further to (1) above, members of Schools Forum considered long-term proposals for the use of disapplication funding and to support:

- An approach to the DfE/ESFA requesting an extension of the recovery plan from 3 to 5 years.
- A 2-year investment funding into the activities in paragraph 3.21.
- Actions to be taken against the deficit in years 3 to 5.
- A future contribution level of 0.5%, 0.25% or another level.

(3) That further to (1) above, members of Schools Forum considered activities and the potential savings against the DSG deficit.

(4) That members of Schools Forum be requested to submit their thoughts or ideas on the items discussed in this report to the Head of Access and School Partnerships.

27. Schools Forum Membership Update

The Head of Access and School Partnership submitted a report on Schools Forum membership. He gave a presentation and explained that a Schools Forum should reflect the profile of education provision across the local authority to ensure that there is no in-built bias towards any one phase or group. He explained that the Local Authority had conducted a short review of Schools Forum through a Task and Finish group to ensure that the current membership is appropriate in the light of the evolving balance of schools in Swindon and with regards to the 2002 Education Act, Schools Forum (England) regulations 2012 and Schools Forum Operational and Good Practice Guide 2015. He further explained that the Task and Finish group considered the proportion of, membership, different categories of membership and the terms of office for the Schools Forum. He confirmed that the group agreed that the current membership would remain the same and requested that an invitation be extended to the Swindon SEND Families Voice.

In response to concerns raised regarding representation from the secondary sector, the Director: Inclusion and Achievement confirmed that the task and finish group members did not feel there was mis-representation of secondary schools in terms of members and pupils and that membership properly represented the range of schools in Swindon.

Resolved – That School Forum agrees:

(1) That the number of school representative remains as per the current membership.

(2) That a representative from Swindon SEND Families Voice be invited onto the Forum to specifically to advise on the use of high needs funding and impact upon children with SEND.

28. Status of Requests for Action and / or Information

Please note attached.