

Schools Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 17 July 2023

Forum Members Present: Andy Park – in the Chair, Gavin Shortall, Mike Cooke, Cllr Reid, Edward Vitalis, Angela Stansfield, Colin Harvey-Ribgy, Alan Braven, Amy Davenport, Antonio de Paola, Iram Cheema, Isabelle Qamar

Apologies: Hatim Kapacee, Lee Ormsby and Helen Child

Also Present: Anne Summerfield, Amanda Corcoran, Cathryn Baggaley, Helen Child, Paul Greenwood, Matthew Hoeksma, Vandhna Kohli, Ann Salata

SF/23/9. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2023 were submitted for consideration as a correct record.

Decision

To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2023 as a correct record.

SF/23/10. Analysis of Excessive School Balances 2022/23 & Clawback

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Education and Schools which provided an analysis of excessive balances across the Local Authority Maintained School sector for the 2022/23 schools finance period. In view of the Authority's established clawback mechanism for surplus balances, the report invited all Maintained Schools Forum representatives to vote on the percentage of the eligible surplus balance to be recouped (with options of either 50% or 100%), noting that recouped funding would be used to address the ongoing High Needs Block (HNB) deficit in the Dedicated School Grant (DSG). All School Forum members were however given the opportunity to comment on the proposals.

The Forum noted the relative decrease in surplus balances in comparison with the previous financial year, with the number of schools with excess balances reportedly reducing by 45%. The Forum also took into consideration the commitments provided by school in terms of the surplus balances and the mitigations applied by the Local Authority in respect of associated grant funding. It was confirmed that the opportunity still exists for schools to collaborate with the Local Authority where the intention was for significant funds to be retained for large scale capital projects, and that an appeals process for proposed recoupments remained in place. Noting that the outcome would leave schools with an allowable budget surplus of either 5% or 8% dependent on sector, the Forum proceeded to vote.

In view of the recognised pressures on the HNB, Maintained School representatives voted unanimously in favour of the rate of recoupment to be at 100% of eligible surpluses to address the ongoing deficit.

The Directorate Finance Lead – Education and Schools also agreed to undertake a post-recoupment evaluation of balances with the identified cohort. This information would be reported back to the Forum at a date yet be agreed.

Decision

1. To note the analysis of eligible surplus balances across Local Authority Maintained school sector for the 2022/23 financial period.
2. To agree that the rate of recoupment be set at 100% of eligible surpluses to address ongoing High Needs Block pressures in the Dedicated Schools Grant
3. To agree that recouped funds shall be used to alleviate the city's ongoing pressures in the High Needs Block.
4. To note that the Directorate Finance Lead – Education and Schools will undertake an evaluation of post -recoupment balances as requested by the Forum.

SF/23/11. High Needs Block (HNB) Recovery and SEND Improvement Measures

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Children and Schools which discussed the work of the Dedicated Schools Grant Recovery Plan Working Group, and an update of work to maximise value for money through an outcome-based approach.

The report provided information about:

- Recovery plan findings for 2022/23 and the overall Dedicated Schools Grant financial position.
- An evaluation of the potential funding gap for 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- Recovery proposals and the commitment to continued improvement in identified Special Educational Needs and Disability outcomes .

The Forum was asked to note:

- The current projected 2023/24 High Needs Block (HNB) deficit position £5.417m (prior to mitigation).
- that a further update would be provided on 2024/25 position, following confirmation of particular aspects of grant funding to be advised by DfE.
- the Draft recovery plans and actions to try to mitigate the HNB funding gap.

There was a discussion about the Local Authority becoming a regional expert partner with the DfE. The Director of Education described this an opportunity to influence and inform national policy in particular around the approach taken in respect of funding bands. The Directorate Finance Lead – Children and Schools made reference to recent announcements being made with regard to DfE. Further information on those would be circulated to the Forum in due course.

Decision

To note:

- The current projected 2023/24 High Needs Block (HNB) deficit position £5.417m (prior to mitigation).
- that a further update would be provided on 2024/25 position, following confirmation of certain aspects of grant funding to be advised by DfE.
- the Draft recovery plans and actions to try to mitigate the HNB funding gap.