

Schools Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 20 November 2023

Forum Members Present: Andy Park, Gavin Shortall, Lee Ormsby, Saeeda Ishaq, Mike Cooke, Angela Stansfield, Amy Davenport, Alan Braven, Colin Harvey-Rigby, Helen Child, Cllr Reid, Cathryn Baggaley, John Morgan and Isabelle Qamar

Also Present: Amanda Corcoran, Paul Greenwood, Matthew Hoeksma, Vandhna Kohli, Nehal Ayub, Ave Marsh (Observing)

Apologies: Hatim Kapacee and Tony Daly

SF/23/14. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2023 were submitted for consideration as a correct record. The Chair noted that the date on the minutes was incorrect as it stated 17 July 2023 and not 18 September 2023.

Decision

To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2023 as a correct record, subject to the amendment above.

SF/23/15. High Needs Block (HNB) SEND Improvement Measures Recovery Plan

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Children’s and Schools that provided a progress update on Manchester’s SEND improvement measures recovery plan, covering the following: -

- Potential funding gap 2023/24 and 2024/25 (section 2).
- Continuing SEND improved outcomes and recovery (section 3).
- DSG financial implications and school block transfer (section 4).

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is a ringfenced grant, that has four separate funding blocks, of which one is the high needs block (HNB), funding specialist education provision for children and young people up to 25 years old with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

DSG cumulative position 2022/23 is a £1.417m overspend, and this was primarily due to the growth in the Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCP), Post-16, independent special placements (ISP), and use of other local authority (OLA) in the HNB. Current forecasts for 2023/24 are £3.902m overspend in year, increasing to £8.545m in year overspend 2024/25, before SEND improvement recovery actions.

The HNB is the most financially volatile block of the DSG, which has been recognised nationally as part of the DfE “SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan”.

Within section 3 of the report, it was highlighted that, replacing the previous 6 outcomes of SEND improvement was 4 workstreams, summarised below:

Workstream 1 – Strengthen mainstream schools graduated response
Increase SENCO awareness of funding for SEND
Increase SENCO awareness of training and take up of interventions available
Strengthen offer for children in early years through to KS1.
Review special school outreach offer and target to need
Increase intervention for children with SEMH through outreach
Develop a clear pathway for children with health needs.
Workstream 2 – Reviewing and responding to children with an EHCP
Funding in EHCPs to be responsive to needs
Review banded funding for EHCPs
Review special school partnership and band 5+ funding
Attend reviews of children in high costs placements/independent provision
Ensure we apply the DFE High Needs operational guidance regs for children who are resident out of city.
Attend reviews of young people in special school preparing for post 19 offer
Use basic need funding to increase specialist offer matched to identified needs in Manchester
Open new secondary school in Miles Platting Sept 2024
Workstream 3 -Commissioning of Special Provision
Ensure high-cost specialist education placements are having an impact and provide value for money
Develop a banded funding model for Independent special schools
Continue to expand post 19 Offer
Increase supported internships
Include section 19 /Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS) offer on Alternative Provision framework to ensure best value
Workstream 4 – Generate income for HNB and review other spend
Budget transfer from Schools block (not requested for 2024/25)
Review grant conditions and determine where funding can be used to support recovery actions
Schools' Excessive balance clawback implemented and added to HN block

A member queried if it was realistic that the new secondary school would be open in September 2024. The Director of Education noted that this had been delayed and they were in discussions with the Trust regarding a new opening date. A member raised concerns about the pressures and costs of post-16 and 19 places. The Director of Education noted that there was a pressure for all young people on post-16

places. They felt it was helpful that there was a dedicated commissioner for this, doing a good job of negotiating the cost of some of the placements in the independent sector. Grant funding had also recently been received to increase supported internships. Post-19 was noted as not being a statutory requirement and creative options were being looked into around the pressures felt, such as not being in college full-time and what could be done in that time instead.

A member raised concerns around the number of years that strengthening the offer for children in early years through to KS1 would take to get to secondary school and if anything could be done more strategically on the transition from Primary to Secondary for pupils. The Director of Education confirmed that strategic options were under consideration too.

Concerns were raised by a member regarding pupils who should be in Reception remaining in early years with their EHCP as there are no places in special schools and around funding for the extended offer in Early Years to two-year-olds from April and then from 9 months old a year later. The Director of Education stated that they would look into the issue around two-year-olds away from the meeting and go back to the member with a more considered response in terms of how that would be funded. They noted that they were aware of pupils remaining in Early Years and that was being looked into.

Decision

Schools Forum members approved:

- SEND improvement recovery plan actions proposed by the Council and Recovery Board
- No school block transfer to HNB in 2024/25. The Council will not be requesting 0.5% school block transfer, given the expectations of the recovery measures. If the improvement measures do not have a positive impact on outcomes and financial stability, there is an expectation that a block transfer request 2025/26 could be required.

SF/23/16. 2024/25 Funding Update - October 2023 Announcement

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Children’s and Schools that provided a summary and impact of the Department of Education (DfE) October 2023 funding announcements:

- National Funding Formula (NFF) 2024/25 update due to technical error.
- Teacher pension contribution increase and expected funding from April 2024.

Initial allocations for the 2024/25 of the schools National Funding Formula for primary and secondary schools were published in July 2023, however pupil numbers had been under-forecast by the Department for Education (DfE)

In October 2023, DfE advised councils of a technical error that had been made in their July 2023 National Funding Formula (NFF) 2024/25 announcements. This recalculation means that where before mainstream school funding was promised an uplift of 2.4% across most NFF factor values, this uplift will now be reduced to 1.4%

to accommodate the wider pupil cohort. The report included implications on the 2024/25 primary and secondary school funding due to be received by the Council.

The outcome of the valuation of the Teachers' Pension Scheme, confirmed an increase to the employer contribution rate by 5% from 1 April 2024. The DfE had stated there would be additional funding to cover the increase in the employer contribution for financial year 2024/25.

The Council was due to receive the 2024/25 settlement in December 2023. Schools are likely to receive smaller budget increases than they may have anticipated following initial DfE announcements in July.

A member queried if Early Years being rolled into the funding rate was beneficial for all sectors, even those who did not employ teachers in nursery. The Principal Finance Manager – Adults, Children and PSR noted this would depend, but more detail was provided in the next item. They stated that there would be some eligibility criteria to qualify.

Decision

To note the report.

SF/23/17. Early Years Quality Supplement 2024/25

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Children's and Schools that stated that in 2023/24 Manchester introduced an early year's quality supplement for 3-and 4-year-olds, as a result of the Department for Education (DfE) rolling the teachers' pay grant (TPG), and teachers' pensions employer contribution grant (TPECG) into Council's overall funding allocation for 3- and 4-year-old entitlement. Previously the TPG and TPECG were paid as a separate grant direct to school-based nurseries, to support settings with teachers' pay awards and pension costs.

In January 2023, the Council had opened a funding consultation with early years settings to gather views on the need for a quality supplement, a metric to be used to measure it, and consideration if a further review was needed for budget setting beyond 2023/24. The consultation outcome, reported to Schools Forum in March 2023, gave a strong opinion agreeing with the supplement for 2023/24 but for a review of the quality supplement going forward from 2024/25. A working group was set up to carry out the review, this report provided an update on the review and proposal regarding early years quality supplement.

All Schools Forum members were asked to vote on:

- The inclusion of early years quality supplement in 3-and 4-year-old local funding formula (rate based on the rolling in of the TPG and TPECG into the 3- and 4-year-old core funding).
- The eligibility criteria for the quality supplement, is where the early year's provision must be led by a qualified teacher working directly with children and the setting incurs additional costs due to teachers pay and conditions.

Decision

Schools Forum members approved:

- The inclusion of early years quality supplement in 3-and 4-year-old local funding formula (rate based on the rolling in of the TPG and TPECG into the 3-and 4-year-old core funding).
- The eligibility criteria for the quality supplement, is where the early year's provision must be led by a qualified teacher working directly with children and the setting incurs additional costs due to teachers pay and conditions.

SF/23/18. De-delegated Budgets 2024/25

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Education and Schools that sought permissions from maintained School Forum representatives on the 2024/25 de-delegation, for the deduction of Education Services Grant (ESG) duties and trade union facilities.

De-delegation is an option that enables some services to maintained schools to be provided centrally, and the funding to do so is retained by the Council. If de-delegation stops, then the centrally retained funding would be delegated in the main school budget and the local authority would either stop providing or would charge for the service.

A member queried if there was a comparison of what the actual cost was with what was recouped from schools in terms of Trade Union Facility Arrangements. It was noted that it was a similar cost to what was recouped.

A member noted that there was now more Academy schools paying into the Trade Union Facility Arrangements that did not previously.

Maintained schools' representatives, by sector of Primary and Secondary, were asked to approve de-delegation for the following:

- Trade Union Duties: £203k which at current pupil levels equates to £5.98 per school aged pupil (section 2).
- Education Services Grant (ESG) General Duties: £0.5m which at current pupil levels equates to £14.75 per school aged pupil (section 3).

Decision

Maintained schools' representatives, by sector of Primary and Secondary, approved de-delegation for the following:

- Trade Union Duties: £203k which at current pupil levels equates to £5.98 per school aged pupil (section 2).
- Education Services Grant (ESG) General Duties: £0.5m which at current pupil levels equates to £14.75 per school aged pupil (section 3).