

Manchester Schools Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2020

Present: Patricia Adams, Gillian Houghton, Mike Cooke, Nichola Davidge, Michael Flanagan, Alan Braven, Andy Park, Ian Fenn, Joshua Rowe, Michael Carson, Phil Hoyland, Councillor Stone, Cath Baggaley, John Morgan

Apologies:

Emma Merva, Tony Daly, Edward Vitalis, Walid Omara, Antonio De Paola, Joanne Fenton

SF/20/04 Minutes

Decision

To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2020 as a correct record.

SF/20/05 Excess Clawback Review

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Children and Schools which discussed the policy applied by the Local Authority (LA) when seeking to retrieve funds from a maintained school where the balance at year-end is deemed to be surplus. The Forum was asked to consider the policy following its first year of operation.

In considering the criteria by which a balance may be deemed 'surplus' the Forum had previously decided that the following criteria must be met:

- a school had an excessive surplus balance beyond a given threshold (which was sector specific)
- that the surplus had been retained for more than four years

Subject to meeting the above criteria, the LA would undertake to retrieve 50% of the surplus which would then be used to support High Needs funding given the ongoing shortfall. That mechanism had been used this year.

The maintained school representatives of the Forum were now asked to consider whether or not to change these arrangements for 2020/21, and two options were being put forward: whether to claw back 50% or 100% of the excess.

In discussing it forum members raised questions relating to the treatment of federated schools and on how appropriate it might to use or change this mechanism given the historic variability in pressures on school budgets. There were also questions on what was going to be included in the calculation of balance, issues such as late monies, free school meal funds, and top-up allocations. It was however recognised that the clawback was used to fund high-needs spending, which was also under considerable pressure. It was said that the current arrangement that the Forum had agreed for 2019/20 was working sufficiently well, and it did not need to be fixed

or altered. Other members of the Forum supported the continuation of the 50% option into 2020/21.

Having discussed the matter it was clear that there was a range of options across the members of the Forum, and the Council's finance officers agreed to reflect on what had been said before coming to any decision.

Decision

To note the options presented in the report, with a preference amongst some members for the continuation of the 2019/20 arrangements.

SF/20/06 Insurance for Schools

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead - Children's and Schools which discussed recent changes applied by the Department for Education (DfE) to the Academies Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA). This voluntary scheme which affects academy trusts and local authority maintained schools in England is not an insurance scheme but provided the same cover to schools as a mechanism through which the cost of risks that materialise would be covered by government funds. Maintained schools would be eligible to opt in to this voluntary scheme from 1 April 2020 with no penalties for not joining.

The benefits, drawbacks and points for consideration associated with opting in were set out in the report. The report explained that at present many schools arranged their insurance through the Council's agreement with an external insurer. The Council was unable to cancel that agreement without penalty, so the Council could not encourage schools to sign-up to the RPA, as it could result in the Council being in breach of the agreement it already has in place. However, the Council was also unable to price-match the cost of the RPA across all schools. Schools that did decide to opt into the RPA would need to provide assurance the Council.

Maintained school representatives of the Forum were invited to provide a view on the RPA offer.

Some members of the Forum welcomed the RPA proposal and there was some challenged to the Council's value for money compared to the RPA. Assurance was sought that the Council's was undertaking a robust approach to the procurement of insurance, to get the best prices possible for those schools that did not opt into the RPA. It was also explained that the Council's approach provided cover for some risks that were not within the scope of the RPA, so schools were protected from more risks.

Decision

To note the report.

SF/20/03 Pension Administration Duties Update

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead - Children's and

Schools which discussed changes to the way maintained schools are charged in respect of annual pension administrative fees and fines incurred as a result of non-compliance with the pension scheme. The Local Authority (LA) had previously consulted to Forum regarding its intention to impose an annual fee to schools who use payroll providers other than the Local Authority in light new statutory reporting arrangements, which resulted in an increased workload. As a result of those discussions the LA had undertaken to charge fees that were be based on a rate per employee eligible to be a member of the teachers' pension scheme. Maintained school representatives of the Forum were asked to note the LA's intention to proceed on that basis.

Decision

Members noted the proposal and felt that the approach would be fairer to schools.

Manchester Schools Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2020

Present: Gillian Houghton, Mike Cooke, Hatim Kapacee, Saeede Ishaq, Gavin Shorthall, Nichola Davidge, Tony Daly, Michael Flanagan, Philip Geldard, Alan Braven, Walid Omara, Joseph Brownridge, Helen Child, Andy Park, Emma Merva, Joshua Rowe, Michael Carson, Edward Vitalis, Isobel Booler, Councillor Stone, Cath Baggaley, John Morgan, Jimmy Buckley, Antonio De Paolo, Amanda Corcoran,

Also Present: Councillor Bridges (Portfolio Holder)

SF/20/14 Election of the Chair and Vice Chair

The Forum received nominations to appoint Andy Park as Chair of the Forum, and for Mike Cooke to be appointed as Vice Chair for the remainder of the academic year. Both nominations were seconded. No other nominations were received. The Forum voted by acclamation and unanimously voted to appoint both nominees.

Decision

To appoint Andy Park as Chair of the Forum, and Mike Cooke as Vice Chair for the remainder of the academic year.

Decisions

SF/20/15 Minutes

The minutes of the September 2020 meeting were submitted for consideration. The Chair explained that the minutes of the March 2020 meeting would now be submitted to the Forum's next meeting for consideration.

Decision

1. To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2020 as a correct record.
2. To note that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2020 would be submitted to the Forum's next meeting.

SF/20/16 Council Budget and Savings Options

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Children and Schools which set out the recently announced Council budget and Savings options proposal for 2020/21 in the context of the projected potential impact on Manchester's schools. The report also discussed further areas for consideration subject to the outcome of the Local Government Settlement. The Forum was asked to note the report taking into account that the proposals were not yet agreed, were out to public

consultation until early 2021, and were yet to be considered by the Council's scrutiny committees.

It was explained that due to the scale of the budget gap some decisions were required in advance of the Spending Review and the Local Government Finance Settlement (due in late December) to enable the budget to be balanced next year. Therefore a number of imminent savings proposals /efficiencies were set out in the following areas:

- **Service levels agreements with schools** – an increase in the charge for the Newly Qualified Teacher offer following a benchmarking exercise with the assurance that this could be increased without reducing take-up.
- Key Stage Two Writing Moderation – a proposal to charge Primary Academies are charged £200 for Manchester City Council to act as Moderation Provider.
- Quality Assurance - a proposal to charge Academies 50% of the cost of the Quality Assurance Professional visit (£475 per visit). These activities were anticipated to generate **£30k** 2021/22 onwards.
- **Schools Quality Agreements** – a proposal to utilise part of the School Improvement Grant to fund School Quality Assurance officer posts and release capacity in the Local Authority's budget. A **£300k** saving would be achieved in 2021/22. This would then reduce to £150k, 2022/23 onwards and retain elements of the established and effective Quality Assurance model.
- **Free Travel** - following a review of the Free Travel Policy and the creation of more secondary school places across the city, a **£400k** projected saving from the Free Travel budget 2021/22 onwards based on the current level of applications made for free school travel.
- **Early Years Speech and Language Commission** – a proposed revision of the Speech and Language Therapy pathway to be redesigned with partners. Reductions would be phased incrementally over a three-year period, starting in 2022/23 at a rate of **£100k** per annum.
- **Dedicated Schools Grant - (£1m)** - Contribution to support to multi-agency placements has been reduced in 2020/21 and will be drawn down upon on a one-off basis in 2021/22.
- **School Catering Service** – At its December 2020 meeting, the Executive would consider a proposal to accelerate the withdrawal of the Council's offer for the school meals provider market in 2021/22. This would then no longer require the need for further revenue support to the school meals function. A cost avoidance of c£450k was reported. Implications for staff were outlined.

In light of the significant deficit in the Local Authority's budget it was also explained that further options were being developed across Children and Education Services Directorate savings in the region of £7.381m. This figure would however be influenced by the outcome of the Settlement as well as feedback from the public consultation. Where possible the savings had been designed to protect front line services. The Forum was therefore asked to note in the context of the depth and scale of the Local Authority's budget gap, the potential impacts / risks to Manchester schools.

The risks were summarised as:

- An adverse impact on the most vulnerable children in the city
- A reduced capacity to sustain progress and limiting the scope to reform/innovate
- Reduced work with schools which could impact on the positive relationship which currently exists between schools and the Local Authority and risks fragmentation of the school system in the city.
- Increase numbers of young people not in education, employment or training
- A significantly reduced preventative service/offer leading to compromised specialist services, increases in social work caseloads, quality of practice, unmet need, edge of care leading to:
 - Increased care costs
 - Judicial costs/review
 - Reduced effectiveness and efficiency of the Directorate
 - Potential reputational harm for Manchester City Council

The Forum took into consideration that the following item of business discussed proposals for an updated HNB Recovery Plan as a consequence of the DSG overspend in 2019/20 due to ongoing / cumulative HNB pressures, and noted the report.

Decision

To note the report.

SF/20/17 De-delegated Budgets 2021/22

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead - Children's and Schools which sought permission, in line with XXXXX, to de-delegate Trades Union Services and Education Services Grant General Duties funding in the 20/21 budget. The report provided information about the services and the associated costs for each element.

In accordance with Schools Forum powers, maintained schools' representatives were specifically asked to approve de-delegation for the following:

- Trade Union Duties: £200k which at current pupil levels equates to £5.18 per school aged pupil
- Education Services Grant General Duties: £500k which at current pupil levels equates to £13.01 per school aged pupil

In addition, and in view of the approaching contract end (end March 2021) for the provision of on-line Free School Meals software, approval to de-delegate this cost was also included. Maintained School representatives of the Forum were asked to consider two options for the transition to going directly to the provider for the software licence.

- **Option A:** Local Authority (LA) to seek extension of on-line Free School Meals (FSM) checking software contract for a further 12 months and include in de-delegation.

- **Option B:** Current contract to end and schools to seek contracts with providers directly.

There was a discussion about the pressures that COVID-19 had placed on schools in addition to ongoing wider challenges. There was also discussion about the positive impact that the online Free School Meals software had made in quickly identifying eligible pupils. Maintained school representatives agreed the de-delegations for Trades Union and Education Services Grant General Duties and unanimously agreed to Option A in respect of the online Free School Meals software.

Decision

To approve the following de-delegations:

- **Trade Union Duties:** £200k which at current pupil levels equates to £5.18 per school aged pupil
- **Education Services Grant General Duties:** £500k which at current pupil levels equates to £13.01 per school aged pupil
- **On-line Free School Meals (FSM) checking software:** to agree the de-delegation and agree that the Local Authority (LA) shall seek an extension contract for a further 12 months.

SF/20/18 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Position

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead - Children's and Schools which discussed the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget position. The DSG final position 2019/20 was an overspend of £4.28m, which was attributed to pressures within the High Needs Block (HNB). The cumulative forecast position as at 31 March 2021 was reported as a £4.24m deficit. This was due to ongoing HNB pressures which had arisen from growth in the number of pupils with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in the city, as well as post 16, out of area placements and alternative provision for excluded pupils.

The report went on to discuss amendments to the High Needs Block Recovery Plan over the next two years in order to achieve savings of an average £2.12m in each of the following two financial years (2021/22 and 2022/23). The Forum would consider the detail of the Recovery Plan as its following item of business on the meeting's agenda. This report would discuss the factors contributing the overspend and key budget pressures.

Decision

- 1 To note the Dedicated Schools Grant 2020/21 outturn forecast as at Period 5 (August 2020)
- 2 To note the cumulative Dedicated Schools Grant deficit forecast of £4.24M as at the end of 2020/21

SF/20/19 High Needs Block Recovery

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead - Children's and

Schools which presented a plan to provide efficient and effective use of High Needs Block (HNB) resources, to achieve maximum value for money. The report described a continued growth in the High Needs population, which had led to the need for a recovery plan to provide efficient and effective use of HNB resources and achieve maximum value for money whilst supporting the overall objective of continuing to improve outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities through quality specialist places and provision in the city.

In light of the expected DSG deficit position for 2020/21, the in-year HNB overspend and the provisional settlement for 2021/22, the HNB recovery had been updated for financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23. Ongoing pressures still present in the HNB would be monitored carefully over the coming years whilst continuing to review service provision efficacy. The Forum was invited to note and comment on the Local Authority's savings and strategies to mitigate the pressures and close the gap.

There was a discussion about the rising pressures in schools in meeting pupil's needs, the national trend towards growth in pupils with EHCPs, and the impact that the additional funding from the DfE had made to Manchester's deficit. The Forum noted the proposals.

Decision

1. To note the High Needs Block outturn forecast as at Period 5 (August 2020) 2020/21
2. To note the pressures on the High Needs Block over the next three financial years: 2020/21 to 2022/23.
3. To note the High Needs Block Recovery Plan and the proposed savings put into place to mitigate the pressures.