

Manchester Schools Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2021

Present: Alan Braven, Andy Park, Jo Fenton, Michael Carson, Tony Daly, Gavin Shortall, Mike Cooke, Lolita Hall, Jimmy Buckley, John Morgan, Councillor Reid, Philip Geldard

Also present: Councillor Bridges (Portfolio holder)

Apologies: Gillian Houghton, Hatim Kapacee, Helen Child and Alan Burton

SF/21/20 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2021 were submitted for consideration as a correct record.

Decision

To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2021 as a correct record.

SF/21/21 De-delegated Budgets 2022/23

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Children and Schools which sought permissions from maintained School Forum representatives on the deduction of Trade Union, Education Services Grant duties, and the on-line Free School Meals software costs. The report also made reference to the recently launched Department of Education (DfE) consultation on how Local Authority School Improvement Functions are funded, seeking views on the removal of the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant (SIMBG) to establish whether greater flexibility was required for funding through the de-delegation process. Dependant on the outcome of that consultation, this was highlighted as a potential further proposal for de-delegation in the January 2022 Forum meeting.

The Principal Finance Lead – Children's and Schools introduced the report, providing additional information on the functions of the service areas proposed for de-delegation, as well as how the de-delegation would impact on individual school budget shares. She asked the Forum to note that the figures discussed within the report were based on May 2021 census data and therefore were provisional, with more accurate figures derived from October 2021 census data intended for submission at the January 2022 meeting.

Maintained school representatives of the Forum were asked to approve de-delegation for the following:

- Trade Union Duties: £200k which at current pupil levels equates to £5.45 per school aged pupil .
- Education Services Grant General Duties: £500k which at current pupil levels equates to £13.56 per school aged pupil
- On-line free school meal (FSM) checking software: £55.3k which at current

pupil levels equates to £1.45 per school aged pupil .

There was a discussion about there being a quorum of maintained school members in order for the vote to proceed. The Directorate Finance Lead – Children and Schools agreed to instead defer the vote until the January 2022 meeting as part of the Dedicated Schools Grant report following the outcome of the Settlement.

Decision

1. To agree to defer the decision on the following proposed de-delegations to the January 2022 meeting:
 - Trade Union Duties: £200k which at current pupil levels equates to £5.45 per school aged pupil .
 - Education Services Grant General Duties: £500k which at current pupil levels equates to £13.56 per school aged pupil
 - On-line free school meal (FSM) checking software: £55.3k which at current pupil levels equates to £1.45 per school aged pupil .
2. To note that a further request for de-delegation in the 2022/23 budget may be presented in January 2022, dependent on the outcome of DfE consultation on phasing out the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant (SIMBG)

SF/21/22 Schools Condition Survey

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Children Services and Education which set out the Local Authority's (LA) intention to commission detailed condition surveys, updated floor plans, and refreshed net capacity assessments across the maintained school estate. The updated suite of information would be used to effectively prioritise capital investment on a needs basis to ensure the ongoing suitability and safety of buildings. The Forum was invited comment on the proposal and note that financing options for the commission would be presented to the Forum's January 2022 meeting.

The Directorate Finance Lead – Children Services and Education introduced the report and outlined the mechanism by which grant monies are administered to applicable schools and how those limited funds would be prioritised following the outcome of those surveys. She indicated that in light of limited funds allocated through the grant, priority would be given to schools where significant health and safety concerns were found.

Decision

To note the report.

SF 21/23 Schools Consultation Outcome for National Funding Formula Transition

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Children Services and Education which discussed the outcome of a consultation across Manchester

schools to understand their views on the proposals to further develop a single national funding formula (NFF) system to direct funds to schools. The Forum had previously considered the details of this consultation, along with the anticipated financial impact of the NFF and Manchester's draft response to the consultation at its September 2021 meeting.

The Senior Finance Manager – Schools introduced the item with a focus on the updated consultation responses in light of the consultation having closed after the report's publication. She asked the Forum to note that since the report's publication a total of 44 schools out of 180 had responded to the consultation.

In response to the question on whether the Local Authority should begin transitioning from the Local Funding Formula (LFF) to the National Formula Factor (NFF) in 2022/23, a total of 37 schools were in favour, 1 school did not agree and 6 schools were unsure. Numerous schools had requested information about what their individual budget share would amount to under the different models however, as was the case for Forum members in the September, this information could not be provided due to the level of information that had been provided by the ESFA. A few schools reported that they lacked sufficient information to respond, leading them to respond as 'unsure'. The school that did not agree with transition in 2022/23 commented that they acknowledged that the LFF was very generous with regard to levels of deprivation in the city in contrast to the NFF. A majority of schools had agreed with the proposed transition, commenting that it would be prudent to begin a gradual and longer transition period, that it would facilitate strategic budget planning and would enable a real-time analysis of impact. In addition, comments were submitted to the effect that the proposed model would reduce the reliance on the Minimum Funding Guarantee.

In response to the question on whether the Local Authority should introduce the NFF Free School Meals (FSM) factor into the LFF in 2022/23, a total of 37 schools were in favour of the introduction, since it was felt it would help target deprivation levels in the city given the number of schools with FSM eligible pupils. No schools were opposed, however 7 schools responded as 'unsure' citing that they did not have enough information to respond. The Senior Finance Manager – Schools feedback that there had been some themes of uncertainty emerging from the consultation in respect of whether this would replace the LFF's FSM6 factor. She, however, asked the Forum to note that this would be an additional factor to the pre-existing one. Another concern which arose from the question was whether this would create an additional administrative burden. The Senior Finance Manager – Schools asked the Forum to note that this would not be the case as it would be derived from the pre-existing administrative activity.

A member commented on the number of schools (44 out of a possible 180) that had responded to the consultation. The Directorate Finance Lead – Children Services and Education advised that whilst the number appeared low, this was relatively high return rate for a school funding consultation. She added that the technical nature of the questions and inability to provide information on individual school budgets may however have influenced a reluctance to respond to the consultation.

Decision

To note the consultation outcome.

SF 21/24 Scheme for Financing Schools

The Forum considered a report of the Directorate Finance Lead – Children Services and Education which presented minor amendments to the Authority’s Scheme for Financing Schools for approval, with maintained school representatives being invited to approve the amendments in line with the established procedure.

The Principal Finance Lead – Children and Schools introduced the report section by section. She asked members to note that no direct revision had been required by DfE, however a minor change in the wording had taken place to align with DfE phrasing. In addition, the Schools Financial Regulations which underpin the Scheme and through which schools are required to align their management and control school financial activity had been updated. Updates included strengthened guidance on the Council’s Social Value policy and Ethical Procurement policy which incorporates the Manchester Living wage (MLW) and changes to reflect UK Statutory regulations in replacement of former European Union regulations. She gave emphasis to there having been no fundamental changes to either value or process.

In respect of the Social Value and Ethical Procurement policies it was explained the at the Council now has Real Living Wage accreditation which requires that procurement activity ensures that the third parties pay their employees the MLW. Whilst these policies were not applicable to Academies, they were being urged to consider the adoption of those policies to drive the positive economic benefits to the city. She added that work had taken place with the Council’s Procurement team to develop support for schools in the form of concise guidance and easy to follow policy guidance for circulation to maintained schools.

A member commented that whilst the MLW was perhaps easier to understand, more enhanced support in the form of training for schools may be necessary to raise awareness about the Council’s Social Value and Ethical Procurement policies in light of the complexities around subcontracting matters. The Directorate Finance Lead – Children Services and Education agreed to share those comments with the Council’s Procurement team and feedback to Forum in due course.

Decision

1. To note that there were no changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools 2021
2. To note that Procurement guidance within Schools Financial Regulations had been updated and would be circulated to maintained schools
3. To note the Council’s Social Value and Ethical procurement policies, incorporating information about the Manchester Living Wage.

SF/21/25 Any other Business: Funding Settlement Update

The Directorate Finance Lead – Children Services and Education provided and update to the Forum on the funding settlement. The Forum had considered provisional information on the settlement at its September 2021 meeting. Following the Chancellor series of statements in late October 2021 on funding at a national level. Precise detail on Manchester’s settlement was not yet confirmed however, based on those announcements early indications suggested an increase to the primary and secondary per pupil amounts in comparison to previous projections. The exact extent of the increase was however not yet known. Nationally an extra £1.6B had been allocated next year and thereafter a further £4.7B would be allocated up to the 2024/25 financial years. In addition, a further £160M would be allocated to the Early Years block, with £180M the following financial period and £170M for 2024/25. This would therefore lead to an increase in the hourly rate though the exact extent of that increase was as yet unclear. Manchester’s settlement would be confirmed in mid to late December 2021, so further and more detailed information would be presented at the January 2022 meeting.

Decision

To note the update.

SF/21/26 Any other Business: Retiring Member Joanne Fenton

The Chair acknowledged that this was Joanne Fenton’s last meeting of the Forum due to a change in headship. He thanked Ms Fenton for her strong and valuable contribution to the work of the Forum as well as to the sector and wished her every success for the future.

Decision

To thank Ms Fenton for her strong and valuable contribution to the work of the Forum, the city and the wider sector and wish her every success for the future.