

DARLINGTON SCHOOLS FORUM

12th January 2021

MINUTES OF MEETING TUESDAY, 13TH OCTOBER 2020

MEMBERS PRESENT:

D Judson (Swift Academies (Chair)); M Butler (Education Village); C Large (St John's CE Academy, CE Diocese); M Shorten (Carmel College); M Fryer (Governor, Hummersknott); KA Lyle (The Rydal Academy); P King (Fed of Mowden Schools); S Welsh (Whinfield Primary); P Ayto (Reid Street Primary); S Hudson (Rise Carr College); S Crowther (Mt Pleasant); K Reid (Polam Hall); H Dummett (Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools); N Gibbon (St Aidan's Academy); J Moorhouse (Carmel Academy Trust); P Richardson (DBC); E Long (Play Hut).

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

B Nielsen (Finance Manager); T Murphy (Head of Education & Inclusion);

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

A Martin (St Aidan's CE Academy); Councillor Clarke; Andrea Latherson-Cassule (ESFA)

APOLOGIES

E Marshall (School Forum Officer); E Sayers (Finance); D Vizzard (St George's);

1. Welcome, Introduction & Register/Declaration of business interests

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and a round of introductions took place.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of Meeting 10th March 2020 & May 2020

The minutes (previously circulated) of the Schools Forum meeting held 10th March 2020 were agreed as a true record.

The notes of the decision record from the cancelled May School Forum meeting (previously circulated) were agreed. It was noted that there was a typing error in that 2019/20 was missing a digit.

3. Budget Update 2020/21

The Finance Manager outlined items in the previously circulated report highlighting the changes to the budget and the current projected budget position.

It was noted that the projections to the year end were based upon one term of information and due to ongoing COVID issues that the projections were likely to change. The current projected overspend arises due to high needs and is expected to increase as more children are assessed during the autumn and spring terms.

Recommendations

School Forum noted the current budget position.

School Forum noted the ongoing high needs budget pressures.

4. School Funding 2020/21

The Finance Manager outlined the changes to funding and the school funding formula for 2021/22 as per the previously circulated paper.

The following key items were highlighted to Forum;

Schools

- The schools national funding formula (NFF) now includes the teachers pay and teachers pension grants.
- The NFF rates have increased in line with increased government funding.
- There are little changes to the NFF
- The indicative schools block increase is £2.7million after removing the pay and pension grant
- There is still the ability to move up to 0.5% of the Schools block to another block with Forum approval, which the Local Authority intends to investigate for 2021/22 to help with high needs pressures
- There is no proposal to change the local Darlington formula. However the formula will need to be modelled once the final allocations are received in December to ensure it is affordable. Any proposed changes will be notified to all schools and the Forum.

High Needs

- There are few changes to the guidance for 2021/22.
- The high needs block now includes teachers pay and teachers pension grants for non-mainstream schools.
- The indicative high needs block has an increase of £750,000

Early Year

- No updates have been received

Central Schools

- A small increase to the formula based element (97p per pupil)
- The historic element is to decrease by a further 20% as expected.

Budget Deficit

- There is no requirement to submit a recovery plan, however Forum are to be updated regularly on the high needs budget position.
- ESFA have produced a high needs template to assist Local Authorities with their high needs plans

Discussion took place regarding the paper and the following points were noted

- It was asked if we had expected the high needs budget to be on target this year? It was noted that at the start of the year a balanced budget had been set for high needs in 2020/21 based upon the recovery plan. There is currently a projected overspend in 2020/21 of £294,00 which is significantly less than previous years, however this is expected to increase due to further assessments and the outcome of COVID 19.
- It was raised that when a transfer was agreed by schools from the schools block to the high block in the current year, that this was expected to be the last.
- It was questioned who has responsibility for the budget overspends and why does the high needs keep overspending?
- It was noted that the budget has overspent due to continuing increases in demand and also that some of the actions in the recovery plan had been delayed due to COVID and hence there was a continuing shortfall of local capacity.
- It was noted that,
 - the SEN system had changed to ensure money follows the child,
 - There has been increasing numbers of EHCP issued
 - More children are requiring specialist placements
 - Current placements are still working through the system, so there is a time lag for independent places to decrease
- It was asked that the minutes record, that Forum questioned the year on year overspend on high needs, which was causing increased historic debt. Schools budgets are under significant pressures but need to be managed within resource.

5. High Needs Update

The Head of Education & Inclusion gave the group a verbal update regarding high needs, key points included,

- The SEMH unit at Redhall school is due for completion May 2021 and the SEMH unit at Rise Carr College is due for completion July 2021. Both constructions were delayed due to COVID.
- The Tees Valley SEMH Free School is due for completion September 2022 of which Darlington will have 25 places.
- The above builds will significantly increase capacity in the local areas.
- Wider consultation on issues in the SEN strategy will be discussed through the Education Strategy Group, discussing how to take forward delivery.
- There is to be a refresh of the assessment of needs in Darlington.

Discussion took place and the following points were noted,

- It was raised that there is a primary need for MLD and originally a base was proposed for this but with no provider selected. Is this to be unit to be progressed? This will be looked as part of the refresh of the needs assessment.
- Soft data needs to be reviewed in assessing if any independent placements can be brought back into borough. The SEN service is looking at each child to see if any children can be returned to the two new units, a balance is needed between family willingness and the outcome for the child.
- The Local Authority has invested in a SEND Commissioning officer who will look at the value for money etc. of all service placements.

6. Outreach service Update

The Head of Education & Inclusion presented the previously circulated paper to the Forum. This paper gives an overview of the current outreach offer.

- The Speech & Language Outreach offer has been reviewed, working with the CCG colleagues to ensure it is fit for purpose.
- Hurworth School Autism Outreach. The current funding arrangement was set many years ago and is no longer appropriate, so additional funding will be required in the short term. Future requirements will be looked at as part of the needs assessment.
- Travellers service, the service is being reviewed to ensure it meets current need.
- It was raised that there is an in-balance in the number of travellers in schools and if the current service met all schools needs. Service requirements are to be discussed at a meeting on 19th October to which all heads have been invited.

Forum agreed to increase funding for Hurworth Autism Outreach by £26,381 from the start of the 2020/21 academic year.

7. Any Other Business

No other business

Date/Time/Location of next meeting

Tuesday, 12th January 2021

Microsoft Teams