

DARLINGTON SCHOOLS FORUM
9th March 2021

MINUTES OF MEETING TUESDAY, 12TH JANUARY 2021

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); K Reid (Polam Hall); H Dummett (Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools); S Crowther (Mount Pleasant); N Gibbon (St Aidan's Academy); J Moorhouse (Carmel Academy Trust); E Long (Play Hut); Sally Hudson (Rise Carr College)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Clarke

APOLOGIES

Paul Richardson

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

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of Meeting 13th October 2020

The minutes (previously circulated) of the Schools Forum meeting held 13th October were agreed as a true record.

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.

The following key items were highlighted to Forum:

- The LA contacted the Education Skills Funding Agency and it was agreed that the deduction of £228,000 had been incorrect and this was therefore returned to Darlington's allocation.
- The Schools Block is projected to be underspent by £81,372, which has been used within the 2021/22 funding formula calculation.
- The Central Schools Block is estimated to be underspent by £22,845, an increase in underspend of £19,495 on the previously reported position.
- The High Needs Block is projected to be overspent by approximately £795,000 an increase in projected overspend of £500,000 on the figure reported in October.
- The Early Years block is projected to be underspent by approximately £100,000 an increase in underspend of approximately £33,000 on the previous report. COVID is having a significant impact on the budget and as the final early years allocation for 2020/21 will be updated for the spring 2021 census, with lock down it is expected that funding allocated will decrease. Therefore the final underspend, once clawback takes place is expected to be much lower. The final position will be known in June/July.
- No changes have been made to the reserves since the last Forum and therefore the balance remains at £4,794,408 of deficit.

Overall, the in-year budget for 2020/21 is currently projected to be overspent by £589,809.

The overall estimated budget position for 2020/21 is a deficit of £5,384,217 once the deficit from 2019/20 has been included.

Recommendations

Forum noted the current budget position

Forum noted the ongoing pressures within high needs budgets.

4. School Funding Formula 2021/22

The Finance Manager outlined items in the previously circulated paper.

The results of the questionnaire regarding the transfer of funding from the schools block to the high needs block were highlighted, which included additional information circulated to schools on 11th January 2021. This showed that 75% of schools agreed to a transfer from the schools block to the high needs block in 2021/22, if this did not impact on the national funding formula

(NFF) rates being increased. An additional late response had been received since the papers were circulated, but overall over 70% of schools agreed to a transfer.

The Local Authority had reviewed the questionnaire results and as a result had not gone forward with a proposal to transfer 0.5% as this would have meant the full NFF could not be implemented, which was not agreed by schools

The proposed formula therefore in line with the majority of responses was to transfer funding up to the amount that was affordable whilst still implementing the NFF in full. By using previous years underspend and unused growth funding £332,375 could be transferred from the schools block to the high needs block. This transfer would still allow the full NFF criteria and unit values have been used in calculation of Darlington's school budget shares for 2021/22, including setting the minimum guarantee level at the maximum allowed and also using the mobility factor.

It was asked how growth funding was allocated. Growth is allocated into the schools block on a formula basis calculated by the DfE. This formula includes the previous years allocation which means that year on year allocations do not change by large amounts over a short time.

Recommendations

The Forum agreed to a transfer of £332,375 from the schools' block to the high needs block in 2021/22.

The Forum noted the funding formula budgets for 2021/22 and approved the growth fund criteria for 2021/22

5. High Needs Update

The Finance Manager outlined the key points in the previously circulated paper to update the Forum regarding the 2021/22 high needs budget.

The Head of Education & Inclusion updated the Forum with regard to the two new high needs facilities opening at Redhall Primary and Rise Carr College, as well as progress on the Tees Valley Free school.

The allocations for 2021/22 were discussed. It was noted that invest to save funding was welcomed but must be used to deliver improvements to outcomes and deliver reduced costs.

The DfE have created a template to assist local authorities with planning how they recover high needs deficits. This template was briefly demonstrated to the Forum, with key areas of the tool being highlighted. This template will form the basis of future reporting of the high needs recovery plan to Forum and will be shared with Forum at all future meetings.

Recommendations

Forum noted the proposed usage of the high needs block.

Forum noted the high needs budget deficit and current recovery plan.

6. Budget Setting 2021/22

The Finance manager outlined the key points in the previously circulated paper.

Early Years

The provisional allocations were outlined and it was highlighted that the amount of funding received from the Government for the 3&4 year old hourly rate and the 2 year old hourly rate had increased by 6pence and 8 pence respectively. No other funding rates had changed.

The Local Authority proposed to pass these increases onto providers, by increasing the hourly rates paid by the same amounts. No changes were proposed to the deprivation, early years pupil premium or disability access fund rates in line with no increase from the Government.

The SEN inclusion fund for 2021/22 is to be set at £200,000 as in 2020/21.

No increase is proposed in the £113,754 of funding held centrally.

The maintained nursery school lump sum allocations received for 2021/22 are part provisional and part conditional, with further guidance expected from the DfE later.

Discussion took place regarding the funding of early years and the maintained nursery lump sums which are causing stability issues for early years providers.

Further guidance was expected from the DfE and the modelling would be undertaken with regard to the 3 & 4 year old rate using reserves, though it was expected that further change to the rate over the Government increase, were unlikely.

The Central schools block

Small changes to the funding used in the formula element of the allocation were highlighted to Forum.

Forum were notified that with regard to the historic element of the block that although the allocation had decreased by 20% as expected, that no reductions were needed in 2021/22 due to the funding base being higher. Some spare resource was available but as no new commitments are allowed this is to be held in reserve to soften future budget reductions.

Discussion took place regarding the how future reductions would be decided and it was noted that this work needs to continue throughout 2021/22 rather than awaiting next years budget setting.

Recommendations

Forum noted the budget allocations for 2021/22 from ESFA

Forum noted the proposed early years funding rates for 2021/22 and central early years allocation.

Forum agreed to the proposed usage of the central schools block in 2021/22.

7. Any Other Business

No other business

Date/Time/Location of next meeting

9th March 2021 at 2pm

Microsoft Teams