

DARLINGTON SCHOOLS FORUM
18th May 2021

MINUTES OF MEETING TUESDAY, 9TH MARCH 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT:

D Judson (Swift Academies (Chair)); M Butler (Education Village); M Shorten (Carmel College); M Fryer (Governor, Hummersknott); KA Lyle (The Rydal Academy); P King (Fed of Mowden Schools); S Welsh (Whinfield 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); K Chisholm (Skerne Park Academy);

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Clarke

APOLOGIES

P Richardson (Head of Skills & Employability); P Ayto (Reid Street Primary); E Sayers (Finance Officer); C Stabler (PVI); C Large (St John's CE Academy, CE Diocese)

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 12th January 2021

The minutes (previously circulated) of the Schools Forum meeting held 12th January were agreed as a true record.

2.b Matters Arising following the meeting 12th January 2021

The Finance Manager outlined items in the previously circulated report.

The following key items were highlighted to the Forum:

- The school funding formula had been approved by ESFA on 3rd February
- The High Needs budget for 2021/22 was confirmed
- The Early Years formula hourly rates were confirmed.

Recommendations

- Forum noted the high needs budget for 2021/22
- Forum noted the early years funding formula rates for 2021/22

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 central schools block was projected to be further underspent by £17,600 to £40,445 at the end of the financial year.
- The high needs block is projected to be overspent by £823,000 in year an increase of £28,00 on previous reports.
- The early years block is estimated to be underspent by £100,000 as previously reported, however changes to the final funding for 2020/21 are likely to reduce the underspend due to less children accessing placements during lock down.

Overall, the in-year budget for 2020/21 is currently projected to be overspent by £600,855.

The overall estimated budget position for 2020/21 is a deficit of £5,395,263 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. High Needs Update

The Finance Manager outlined the key points in the previously circulated paper regarding the DfE's consultation titled "Review of national funding formula for allocations of high needs funding to local authorities: changes for 2022-23".

Forum members and schools were encouraged to respond to the consultation.

Discussion followed regarding the questions and points in the consultation. Points raised included.

- The expected outcome of the various options in the questions for Darlington
- The need for a unified response for Darlington
- That as many responses as possible are encouraged to give Darlington a larger voice in the final outcome.
- That further SEN consultations are expected from the DfE and how these interlink

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 Finance Manager outlined the key elements to the previously circulated high needs recovery plan figures (both the DfE template and Darlington's monitoring plan)

Discussion followed with the following key points raised.

- The Tees Valley Free school is in progress to open September 2022, with 20 places for Darlington. An update will be given at a future Forum on how the school is progressing.
- Redhall the build is complete with hand over expected soon. Rise Carr is under construction with completion date to be confirmed.
- How the planned savings would be reported to Forum in particular, out of area/independent placements
- Safeguards within the system to ensure new capacity does not cost the same as existing out of area placements
- Funding rates in Darlington and the ability to influence the rate for the Tees Valley Free school
- Possible changes following the DfE high needs strategy
- The need to ensure children receive the support they need, but within funding available.

Recommendations

Forum noted the DfE consultation

Forum noted the high needs budget deficit recovery plan.

5. 2021/22 Academic Year meeting dates

The Finance Manager noted the Forum dates for the next academic year.

6. Any Other Business

The Head of Education and Inclusion highlighted the focus of Scrutiny Committee regarding early years attendance and sufficiency.

Date/Time/Location of next meeting

12th October 2021 at 2pm

Microsoft Teams