

**DARLINGTON SCHOOLS FORUM  
16<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2023**

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**MINUTES OF MEETING TUESDAY, 16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2023**

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**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

D Judson (Swift Academies (Chair); P Ayto (Reid Street (Vice Chair); M Butler (Education Village); J Blackham (Mount Pleasant); P Richardson (Head of Skills & Employability); J Skirving (St Georges Academy CofE, CE Diocese); K Reid (Polam Hall); Shirley Welsh (Whinfield); Sally Hudson (Rise Carr College); T Abbott (Carmel RC College)

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

E Clennell (Finance Manager); Tony Murphy (Assistant Director Education & Inclusion), Joanne Littler (Head of SEN); Councillor Clarke; Jack Aconley-Foster (Finance Officer)

**APOLOGIES**

P King (Fed of Mowden Schools); M Fryer (Hammersknott); H Dummett (Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools); P Norman (St Bedes RC); D Lythgoe (St Aidan's)

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

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**2. Minutes of Meeting 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

Minutes were agreed from the previous meeting as a true record.

### **3. Budget Update 2022/23**

The Finance Manager outlined the budget position for 2022/23 as per the previously circulated report.

The overall DSG position is projected to have an in-year underspend of £286,720, however £109,297 is earmarked to smooth the reduction to the historic central school's block and £112,147 is also subject to clawback from the Early Years block. The projected deficit before these adjustments is £5,608,860 once the brought forward deficit from the prior year is added.

This is mainly due to savings within the growth fund of £95,000, savings in the Central School Block of £167,656 which is a combination of Early Career Teachers slippage and unallocated funding that will be used to smooth the 20% annual reduction in the historic element of the block. However, the high needs block is projected to overspend in year by £104,575, mainly due to growth in pupil numbers and inflationary increases in high cost, independent placements and out of area placements. Members were informed that there is an ongoing piece of work to make the out of area costs more transparent and categorised. The Early Years block is projected to underspend by £112,147 however this is subject to clawback. It was noted that despite an underspend on the Early Years block, SEN Inclusion was overspent due to an increase in referrals.

#### **Recommendations**

Forum noted the current budget position

Forum noted the ongoing high needs budget pressures

Forum noted the transfer to reserve of the unallocated Central Schools block funding

Forum noted that the underspend in the Early Years block is subject to clawback

### **4. School Funding Formula 2023/24**

The Finance Manager outlined the school funding formula for 2023/24 as per the previously circulated report.

The schools block allocation for 2023/24 was £80.8m after the rates adjustment. Darlington is to receive an additional £408,688 of funding within the school's block for growth however it has been estimated this will not all be required, a provisional budget of £50,000 was proposed. £189,364 of the unallocated growth fund is needed to enable the NFF values to be affordable. It was proposed to operate the growth fund in the same criteria as 22/23. The criteria was listed for members to have sight of.

A minimum funding guarantee of 0.5% was used within the 2023/24 budget share allocation which is the maximum allowable. The finance manager presented the schools block report which shows the impact of this on a school level

### Recommendations

Forum noted the funding formula budgets for 2023/24

Forum approved the growth fund criteria for 2023/24

## **5. Budget Setting 2023.24**

The Finance Manager outlined Budget Setting for 2023/24 as per the previously circulated report.

The DSG is paid in funding blocks subject to NFF. The breakdown of this funding was shown to forum. The schools block has £80.8m before recoupment of £513k for non domestic rates. The Central schools block has an allocation of £956k which is a reduction of £87k from 22/23. Early Years block has an allocation of £7.8m & The High Needs block has a provisional figure of £20.1m which will be altered in year with the high needs import/export adjustment.

It was noted the report was written before the outcome of the consultation to using the full NFF rates and members were informed if the 0.5% block transfer is agreed then the budget shares will be altered as per the previously circulated report.

Supplementary funding has now been rolled into the national funding formula. Forum was advised there was an additional grant outside the DSG which was announced in the Autumn statement. The finance manager informed members there is a calculator available for this grant with indicative figures on.

There are Increases to the provisional early years block allocation of 22p per hour. 9p relates to Teachers pay & pension & 13p is the inflationary uplift. Further work needs to be done around the teachers pay and pension funding and this will be brought to the March forum once further info has been received by the DfE. Disability access fund has increased by £28 per pupil. EYPP has increased by 2p.

The Central Schools Block historic element has decreased by 20% as expected. Unallocated £18k from formula based area and unallocated of £46k from historic block. Its proposed this is transferred as a one off to the HNB to assist with safety valve.

The only increase is the copywrite licence by £8,897.

A paper will be brought to the March forum around the supplementary grant as the DfE have now issued guidance on how much should be distributed to special schools (3.4% top up & place funding).

## Recommendations

Forum noted the budget allocations for 2023/24 from ESFA.

Forum noted the proposed early years funding rates for 2023/24 and agrees the central allocation.

Forum agreed to the proposed usage of the central schools block in 2023/24

Forum agreed that the £169,323.54 surplus in the school budget share be transferred to the high needs block towards the deficit.

Forum agreed that the £65,000 unallocated funds in the Central Schools block be transferred to the High needs block towards the deficit.

## **6. Outcome of Block Transfer Survey**

The Assistant Director (Education & Inclusion) went through the results of the Block Transfer Survey which was previously circulated to schools. 29 schools responded with a response rate of 79.3%.

Q1: Does your school support a 0.5 % transfer from the schools' block to the high needs block in 2023/24, to assist with high needs pressures, if this can be achieved without reducing any of the new increased NFF rates in the 2023/24 formula?

- Yes 29
- No 0

Q2: Does your school support a 0.5 % transfer from the schools' block to the high needs block in 2023/24, to assist with high needs pressures, if this means that some of the new increased NFF rates for 2023/24 will have to be slightly reduced in the 2023/24 formula?

- Yes 6
- No 23

Q3: Does your school support a lower transfer from the schools' block to the high needs block in 2023/24, to assist with high needs pressures, up to the maximum achievable whilst still implementing the new increased NFF rates for 2023/24? This would be capped at 0.5%?

- Yes 29
- No 0

Q4: If your schools do not support any of the transfers suggested in question 1 to 3, do you support a transfer in 2023/24 from the schools' block to the high needs block? If so, at what level would your school be willing to support?

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- N/A as all schools responded yes to either 1, 2 or 3

## **7. Forum Membership**

The members list was presented to forum for members to confirm if it was accurate.

The deputy chair raised that more detail may be needed on the membership list and that members could be identified as to which group they represent. More clarity is needed around this so this will be raised at the next forum meeting.

The list was acknowledged by members and a few adjustments have been made.

## **8. Future Forum Meetings**

The following dates for future school forum meetings were agreed:

Tuesday, 11th October 2022 - 2pm

Monday, 16th January 2023 - 2pm

Tuesday, 7th March 2023 – 2pm

Tuesday, 16th May 2023 – 2pm

## **9. Any Other Business**

The Head of SEND & Inclusion suggested that it would be useful to have a sub group of forum that would look at the HNB given the on going pressures and potential of being entered into the safety valve programme. This would link into the written statement of action and both finance and action would be monitored. Forum agreed.

Terms of reference will need to be agreed for the sub-group.

MB raised that it would be useful to understand the uplifts coming from independent specialist providers going forward.

### **Date/Time/Location of next meeting**

**8<sup>th</sup> March 2023, 10am – 12pm**

**Town Hall, committee room 1**