

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

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**MINUTES OF MEETING WEDNESDAY, 8<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2023**

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**MEMBERS PRESENT:** P Ayto (Reid Street Primary (Vice Chair); H Dummett (Federation of Darlington Nurseries); D Evers (Darlington College Childcare Centre); S Hudson (Rise Carr College); M Kane (Carmel College); P King (Federation of Mowden Schools); D Judson (Swift Academies Trust (Chair); M Ramsay (St John's CofE Academy); K Reid (Polam Hall School); S Welsh (Whinfield Primary); M Butler (EVAT)

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:** J Aconley-Foster (Finance Officer); Councillor Clarke; E Clennell (Finance Manager); J Dellipiani (Education Information Manager); H Ellison (Head of Education Partnerships); J Littler (Interim Head of SEND); T Murphy (Assistant Director of Education & Inclusion)

**APOLOGIES:** J Blackham (Mount Pleasant Primary); J Skirving and C Pollard (St George's CofE Academy); M Shorten (Carmel College); M Fryer (Hammersknott Academy)

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

The Chair was not able to attend the full meeting so the Vice Chair led the meeting. The Vice Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and a round of introductions took place.

**2. Minutes of Meeting 16<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

**3. Budget Update 2022/23**

The Finance Manager outlined the budget position for 2022/23 as per the previously circulated report. There are no changes to Dedicated School Grant levels since last reported. The in-year schools block is estimated to be underspent by £116,491. The in-year central schools block is estimated to be underspent by £82,000 at the end of the financial year. Early Career Teaching spend is lower than last reported and is expected to underspend by at least £68,000. Since the last report the high needs block overspend has slightly increased and the Finance Manager highlighted the main projected movements within the high needs budgets. The early years block is projected to be underspent by £237,932. This is an increased underspend from the last report of £125,785. The Finance Manager asked Forum to note that there may be a movement in PFI as reconciliation is due to be completed by the end of the year.

The Interim Head of SEND explained that as part of the Written Statement of Action (WSOA), the Local Authority is carrying out a review of all resource base provision, which will form part of the work of the proposed sub-group and Forum will be kept up to date.

HD asked why the early years block is underspent when some settings are seeing an increase in 2 year olds numbers. The Finance Manager clarified that the allocation is an estimate; estimates were impacted by the funding methodology used during the pandemic and the overall number of funded hours provided has fallen, hence the projected underspend. The underspend will be clawed back by DfE.

### Recommendations

Forum noted the current budget position.

Forum noted the ongoing pressures within high needs budgets.

Forum noted that the underspend in the early years block is subject to clawback.

#### **4. High Needs Update Proposed Budget 2023/24**

The Finance Manager outlined the proposed High Needs budget 2023/24 as per the previously circulated report. The information in the report is based on the existing allocation and is subject to change throughout the year. It was noted that a request to increase pupil numbers at Beaumont Hill Academy is currently pending a decision by the DfE. The budget plan in Appendix 2 has been reformatted to show the funding split by category so that the share of the allocation can be more easily viewed and monitored. Colleagues thanked the Local Authority for its approach.

The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion thanked the Schools Forum for its support of the Local Authority's application to the Safety Valve Programme and advised that a decision from the DfE is expected soon. Last week, Darlington was successful in bid for a new special free school and further updates will be provided at future meetings.

A suggestion was made for a standing agenda item at future meetings to provide an update on work undertaken to ensure value for money.

### Recommendations

Forum agreed the high needs budget for 2023/24.

Forum noted the ongoing and increasing pressures due to demand within high needs budget deficit and that the budget proposal is linked to the debt management plan and written statement of action.

Forum agreed to the formation of a sub-group to monitor and report on the high need spend and the debt management plan.

#### **5. Early Years Funding Consultation**

The DfE has issued new guidance for 2023-24 detailing changes to funding that relates to the Teachers' Pay and Pension Grant. Schools which provide early years entitlement provision for 3&4-year-olds have historically received a separate grant from the DfE in the form of a Teachers' Pension and Pay Grant. This funding was distributed directly to the qualifying schools based on the number of eligible pupils and was not included in the hourly rates. In 2022/23 this equated to circa £107,000 for Darlington.

From April 2023 this will no longer be the case as the funding will be rolled into the hourly rate and will form part of the funding formula. As a result of this change, there is no guarantee that schools will get the same level of funding allocated to them as under the Teachers' Pay and Pension Grant.

The provisional early years allocation for Darlington includes an increase of 22p per hour for 3&4 year-olds universal and extended entitlement of which:

- 13p relates to the inflationary uplift and Forum agreed to passport this to settings at the January Schools Forum.
- 9p relates to the rolling in of the Teachers' Pay and Pension Grant which has been consulted on.

The consultation ran with all affected providers and included a briefing session. Providers were asked for their views on 2 options for the distribution of this funding:

#### **Option A**

No quality supplement linked to workforce qualifications would be introduced. Instead, the base rate would be increased by an additional 9p per hour for 3- & 4-year-old universal and extended hours for all providers. Therefore, the full increase to the hourly rate would be passported to all providers increasing the hourly rate to £4.70. This option would be equitable across all providers but is not in line with the DfE guidance to implement a quality supplement.

#### **Option B**

A quality supplement would be introduced which would be paid to those providers who employ a qualified teacher to deliver the early years provision, where the employer pays into the Teachers' Pension Scheme for the teacher delivering the early years' provision. The funding supplement would only be payable to those providers meeting appropriate eligibility criteria (to be developed), with providers being required to provide evidence of meeting the eligibility criteria. This would mean that providers meeting the criteria would receive £4.70 per hour and providers who do not meet the criteria would receive £4.61 per hour. This option would be in keeping with the spirit of the DfE guidance and target funding to all providers employing qualified teachers and contributing to the Teachers' Pension Scheme (subject to local eligibility criteria to be developed).

The consultation responses did not produce a consensus. The Schools Forum discussed the 2 options followed by a vote but were not able to reach a consensus. Members requested that the Local Authority consider all the points made during the consultation and today's meeting in the final decision.

### **6. Forum Constitution**

The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion explained it is proposed that a full review of the Schools Forum constitution, including governance arrangements, takes place for presentation at the next meeting in May. The review will include an exploration of the Schools Forum terms of reference, membership, standardisation of paperwork, clarification of the role of clerk, followed by development of an induction for new members.

#### Recommendations

Forum approved the review scope and timetable.

### **7. 2023/24 Academic Year meeting dates**

Tuesday, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023 – 2pm

Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024 – 2pm

Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – 2pm

Tuesday, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2024 – 2pm

The location of the meetings to be confirmed.

### **9. Any Other Business**

School Uniform Exchange Scheme

At the recent Primary Heads Forum and 11-19 Partnerships meetings, schools supported the continuation of the scheme and discussed future funding arrangements.

**ACTION - The Finance Manager** agreed to review the guidance for the School's block to see if there is any scope to fund this from the Schools Block reserve. It was noted that we are not able to add new items to the Central School block.

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

Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2023, 2pm, via Teams