

DARLINGTON SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING MONDAY 17TH JUNE 2019

MEMBERS PRESENT:

D Judson (Swift Academies (Chair)); P King (The Federation of Mowden Schools); P Ayto (Reid Street Primary); M Butler (Education Village); C Large (St John's CE Academy, CE Diocese); H Dummett (Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools); S Crowther (Lingfield Academy Trust); D Vizzard (St George's); K Reid (Polam Hall School); M Shorten (Carmel College); S Hudson (Rise Carr College); M Taylor (St Bede's RC Primary) M Fryer (Governor, Hummersknott); P Richardson (Head of Skills & Employability); K A Lyle (Rydal Academy); N Gibbon (St Aidans CE Academy); Emma Calvert (William House Nursery)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

K Hull (Lingfield Academy Trust)

APOLOGIES

Eleanor Marshall (School Forum Officer), Jennifer Moorhouse (Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle); Elaine Sayers (Finance).

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 12th March 2019

The minutes (previously circulated) of the Schools Forum meeting held 12th March 2019 were agreed as a true record.

3. Budget Update 2018/19

The Finance Manager presented the previously circulated paper on the budget 2018/19.

The Finance Manager informed Forum that the figures in the appendix were the final expenditure for the 2018/19 financial year. The final position was broadly in line with the previous report to Forum in March, with paragraphs 4 to 7 noting any significant changes from previous projections.

The Finance Manager informed Forum that the final position was an overspend of £2.9 million which included £1.5m brought forward from 2017/18. The accumulated overspend on high needs was £3.2 million and therefore high needs accounted for the full budget pressure.

The Finance Manager outlined underspend in other blocks of the DSG and the proposed use of those as noted in the report.

Forum agreed the recommendations,

- To note the final budget position for 2018/19
- To approve carry forward budget from 2018/19 to 2019/20
- To transfer £11,349 from the central schools block into the high needs block in 2019/20 to assist with budget pressures.

4. High Needs Recovery Plan

The Head of Education & Inclusion presented the previously circulated paper, highlighting that the plan was to bring the high needs block in year position into balance in the third year of the plan, but not to recover the historic deficit within the three year period. The plan is to create new provision with three new resource bases and places at a Tees Valley Free Special school.

The paper highlighted the number of ECHP plans and recent trends in the number of plans accepted. It was noted that Darlington appears to have stabilised plan numbers in the last year.

It highlighted that changes are made to funding of the B&A with previous arrangements replaced with a money following the child model.

The risks within the plan were highlighted as follows,

- The ability to return children from current placements
- Any delay in the opening of new provision
- Increased demand for support

The Forum discussed the proposals and the following comments and questions were raised

- Many of the risks are out of the control of the LA, how will they be managed?
- Is there a benchmark/monitoring to assess how the plan is achieving its goals?
- What other plans do we have if this proposal does not succeed?
- It was accepted that there are risks with the plan, but that robust monitoring would take place to highlight issues early in order to allow for actions to be taken. It was acknowledged that some risks are outside of the LA control.
- How would plans be reviewed by ESFA?
- It was questioned whether the position on plans numbers was stabilising, were more children not receiving support?
- The numbers are only from one year so are subject to change, however Darlington is still above national average, without any specific reason, so numbers should be lower.
- It was questioned why Darlington numbers are higher, there should be monitoring of data for trends, for example fixed term exclusion rates.
- Has any analysis being done with data from statistical neighbours? Analysis has been undertaken, Darlington are in a slightly worse position regarding numbers.
- The location of the proposed Tees Valley Free school is currently Grangetown in Redcar & Cleveland
- That the location of the free school was not advantageous to Darlington children due to the need to have long taxi travel.
- Vulnerable children should not have to travel by taxis to Redcar & Cleveland both from a vulnerability viewpoint and on financial grounds.
- It was noted that some children are already transported further than Grangetown on a daily basis due to the lack of nearer provision.
- The Free school would have a lower cost than independent sector provision.
- The strategy is working with health colleagues, there is now a whole system approach between the LA and health. In other areas where they have whole systems approaches there are good SEND inspection ratings.
- There is not enough money in the system
- Reforms in 2014 have led to higher demands and expectations, however funding did not follow the reforms.
- That decisions regarding the allocation of high needs funding a number of years ago may have contributed towards some of the issues now.
- Some out of area placements are due to the local offer not being sufficient. With no additional funding being made available, this can lead to mainstream places breaking down, has an additional funding to schools option been considered?

- The new ranges system allocates funding based upon need and is in line with the code of practice. The vast majority of children will be funded through the ranges banding, but there will always be some packages that require funding outside of the range.
- It was raised that schools can help influence parents to use the new provision. We need to ensure that we know what provision is available across the town and how we can ensure professionals and parents are aware of the provision.
- Work is ongoing with partners on how sharing of the local offer can be improved. The Head of Education & Inclusion has an open monthly open morning which parents can attend to discuss issues. Work is ongoing to make the local offer more user friendly.
- The change in political leadership at Darlington was noted, with Councillor Cruddass the new portfolio holder for Children and Families.

A brief update was given with regard to requirements of ESFA regarding the plan. The plan will be submitted by the 30th June in line within the deadline. It is not known how plans will be assessed as no feedback has been given. There is a lot of uncertainty regarding future funding levels, as at present funding allocations have only been given up to the end of 2019/20. This uncertainty has made it difficult to project future high needs resources and hence the existing allocations have been used in the plan.

Forum agreed the recommendations,

- To note the actions in place to mitigate and minimise forecast high needs pressures
- To approve the High Needs deficit reduction plan

5. Membership of the Schools Forum and Chair

Members were informed that the current two year terms of office for the Forum members expire at the end of this term. All members were asked to if they still wished to stay on the Forum for the next term of office, so they can be included within the selection process.

A number of members do not have deputies, so this will need to be addressed as part of the new membership. A list of current members and deputies will be circulated.

Once the membership for the new term of office is confirmed a Chair and Vice Chair will be elected.

6. Dates of Future meetings

The meetings for the next academic year were confirmed.

7. Any other business

There was no other business.

Date/Time/Location of next meeting

15th October 2019, 2.00 pm. Committee Room 1 – Town Hall

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