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SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 14 October 2020 held remotely

Present: Councillor T. McInerney (Observer)
A. Jones, Democratic Services, HBC
A. McIntyre, Education, Inclusion & Provision, HBC
A. Jones, Financial Management, HBC
N Shafiq, Financial Management, HBC
K. Landrum, (Chair) Primary School with a Nursery Representative
A. Brown, Nursery Schools Representative
J. O'Connor, PVI Representative
J. Coughlan, Primary Representative - Infant School
N. Hunt, Pupil Referral Unit Representative
J. Wilson, Secondary Governor Representative
E. Haver, Special Academy Representative
A. Simmons, Community Primary Representative
J. McConville, Secondary Academy Representative
H. Austin, Community Special Schools Representative
L. Roberts, Small Primary Representative
E. Hall, All Through School Representative (Sub)
A. Latherton-Cassule, EFA (Inspector); and
One member of the press

Action

SCF8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Angela Sheppard, Simon Corner and Ian Critchley (substitute Elaine Hall present).

SCF9 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

SCF10 SCHOOL BALANCES 2017-18 TO 2019-20

The Forum received a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which presented the year end balances for Halton Maintained Schools for the last 3 years.

This information was requested by Forum representatives at the June 2020 meeting and the report presented:

- Appendix A – LMS balances; and
- Appendix B – DFC balances

It was noted that overall schools balances had increased over the last three years, however there were still quite a number of schools using all or part of their previous year's surplus to meet their projected spend.

RESOLVED: That the report is received and noted.

SCF11 DSG FORECAST OUTTURN 2020/21

The Forum received the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) forecast outturn for 2020-21.

It was reported that the DSG for 2020-21 was £122,099,358 which was broken down into the following blocks:

Schools Block	£92,581,025
CSSB	£00,665,450
High Needs Block	£19,044,582
Early Years Block	£09,848,301

The report provided detailed commentary for each of the above blocks and the DSG balances were provided in paragraph 3.6. A breakdown of the budgets, forecast and variance was shown in Appendix A to the report.

Clarity was provided for the PVI representative over the Early Years Block – the DfE had announced that for this year the funding paid to local authorities would be 9/12^{ths} based on January 2020 census plus 3/12^{ths} based on the January 2021 census. For this reason it would be very difficult to forecast and the grant figure would not be received until February 2021, with confirmation of that expected in July 2021.

The challenges faced by Early Years next year were noted and it was estimated that the Early Years Block would come in under budget by approximately £67,871.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

SCF12 DSG FUNDING 2021-22

The Forum received the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) provisional funding for 2021-22.

It was reported that the DSG provisional settlement was announced on 27 July 2020 and used the 2021-22 cash values against the 2020-21 pupil numbers. Officers had drawn up a draft budget based on current knowledge and

expectations; however it was noted that this would change over the coming months as plans were moved forward and numbers firmed up.

Members were advised that within the draft budget, all staffing costs had been increased by 3% to take account of any pay awards. Further, supply and services budgets had largely been kept at the same level as this year, except where it was expected to see increased costs such as for Out of Borough placements. For these budgets therefore, the current years expected costs or calculated expected costs using forecasted numbers were built in.

The report provided detailed commentary for each block of funding: Schools Block (SB), Central Schools Services Block (CSSB), High Needs (HN) Block and Early Years (EY) Block (noted that EY information was yet to be received).

The Special Academy Representative raised concerns that the HN funding would not be enough despite the 8% increase. She advised that their setting was oversubscribed already and they would have very difficult decisions to make going forward.

Members were advised that officers' would not be requesting a transfer from the SB to the HN Block for 2021-22. This was agreed so that schools could receive their full allocation of SB funding which would help with the additional costs incurred due to the Pandemic that may not be covered by grants; and to allow time for more inclusive practices to be in, continuing the rationale from last year.

Officers advised that the consultation on the Funding Formula (FF) and Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) level for 2021-22 was open until 20 October and invited Forum Members to submit their responses. It was agreed that the Forum would make a decision on the MFG via email. The outcome of the consultation would be emailed to Members as soon as it was ready.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

SCF13 NORTH WEST LOCALLY MANAGED SCHOOLS (LMS) UPDATE

A report was presented from the Operational Director – Finance, which presented the key issues discussed at the recent regional LMS meeting, held virtually on 4 August 2020.

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Management,
HBC

The Forum was also advised that a number of DfE virtual meetings had been set up during September and October, to cover subjects that would normally have been discussed at individual seminars at the national conference. The report provided information relating to discussions on *Revenue Funding Policy and NFF in 2021-22* and a *Covid-19 update* from the DfE virtual meeting on 16 September 2020.

Clarification was provided on eligibility when schools were making claims for Covid-19 funding payments. Members were advised that schools could not make a profit from claiming additional money and it must not result in increased balances. Financial Management would offer support to schools who needed guidance on this going forward.

It was agreed that any further information received by the NW LMS on the introduction of school related grants would be shared with the Forum as soon as possible after it was received.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum note the update.

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Meeting ended at 4.50 p.m.