SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 3 November 2021 held remotely

Present:

J. O'Connor, PVI Representative
J. Coughlan, Primary Representative - Infant School
J. Wilson, (Vice Chair in the Chair) Secondary Governor Representative
E. Haver, Academy Special Schools Representative
A. Sheppard, VA Schools Representative
J. McConville, Secondary Academy Representative
H. Austin, Community Special Schools Representative
I. Critchley, All Through Schools Representative
L. Roberts, Small Primary Representative
C. Dalton, Secondary Academies
C. Liku, Community Nursery Representative
A. Jones, Democratic Services, HBC
N Shafiq, Financial Management, HBC
R. Sprigings, Financial Management, HBC
A. Leach, Education, Inclusion & Provision
M. West, Education, Inclusion & Provision

Action

SCF11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Karl Landrum, Thalia Bell and Cllr T. McInerney (Observer).

SCF12 SCHOOLS BLOCK TRANSFER TO HIGH NEEDS BLOCK FOR 2022-23

The Forum considered a report of the Operational Director – Finance, which presented the proposal to transfer 1% of the Schools Block of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to the High Needs Block for 2022-23.

As reported at the October meeting of the Forum, a cumulative DSG deficit of £2.1M was forecasted at the end of March 2022; the key areas of overspend were top-up funding and out of borough placements. It was decided therefore to put forward a proposal to transfer 1% of the Schools Block of DSG to the High Needs Block for 2022-23. This would enable some of the deficit balance to be cleared and fund three *Invest to Save* proposals.

The report outlined in detail the rationale behind the proposal and provided representatives with the outcome of the consultation to the proposal, attached at Appendix A. It was noted that out of 64 schools 14 replied, with 6 in support

and 7 against the proposal. Full details of the responses were attached at Appendix B. Ian Critchley commented that he had provided a response to the consultation, but it was not included in the report, this was noted.

In addition to the above, the Forum was advised of the need to submit a further disapplication request to continue the Exceptional Premises Factor, in relation to the Joint Use agreement between Ormiston Bolingbroke Academy and Brookvale Recreation Centre. The School had agreed to the disapplication request so approval was now sought from Schools Forum for this funding to be continued.

In respect of the proposal for the 1% transfer request, a debate took place, with officers responding to questions from representatives. In summary this included the following:

- The alternatives to not allowing the approval of the 1% transfer;
- The overall deficit of £2.1m;
- The expected 8% increase to High Needs budget next year – High Needs provision had seen a 12% increase in demand so there would still be a shortfall as the funding was not increasing as fast as the rate of need;
- Information was provided from a Special School Representative on the increased number of enquiries made to them for places from mainstream primary schools;
- The separation of *Invest to Save* from the 1%;
- Neighbouring profiles of SEND numbers;
- The increasing referral rates to special schools and cost of placements;
- The increasing demands and challenges faced by the Educational Phycologists (EP) service;
- The differing amounts that would be paid – the bigger the school the bigger the cost;
- Post 16 – more information needed as to whether this is included, together with 18-25 – officers to respond after the meeting;
- The DfE benchmarking tool referred to – statistics provided;
- Special schools had lost some facilities for complex needs so were unable to accommodate complex learners, forcing them out of Borough;
- Also, some SEMH students working above level were not able to access mainstream schools;

- LA schools accommodation discussed and efforts to make use of space available in mainstream schools for SEND pupils and the challenges faced with this;
- The *Peopletoo* SEND review and how its recommendations were being incorporated into the SEND Strategy;
- The need for occupancy rates of Halton schools to be part of the Strategy going forward; as some Runcorn schools were well below capacity in recent years due to falling birth rates;
- The proposed SEMH provision in Widnes was put back by the DfE to September 2023 at the earliest;
- The inconclusiveness of the consultation and the fact that only 14 schools responded; and
- The potential for the same request to be submitted to the Forum next year.

The Chair requested representatives to vote on the 1% transfer proposal; the outcome was:

For:	7 votes
Against:	3 votes
Abstain:	1 vote

The Forum agreed to the continuing use of the Exceptional Premises Factor, in relation to Ormiston Bolingbroke Academy.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum

1) note the report;

2) agrees to the continuing use of the Exceptional Premises Factor, in relation to Ormiston Bolingbroke Academy; and

3) supports the proposal to transfer 1% of the Schools Block Funding from DSG to the High Needs Block, and that the LA progresses this through the appropriate routes within Halton Borough Council before submission of the request to the Department for Education for their consideration.

Meeting ended at 5.05 p.m.