

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting held on 26 November 2019

Present: Richard Redgate (Chairman)

Attendance

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| Philip Siddell | Jennie Westley |
| Sara Bailey | Vicki Lewis |
| Chris Wright | Anne Tapp |
| Kevin Allbutt | Steve Breeze (Substitute) |
| Nicky Crookshank | Les McDowell |
| Richard Lane | Abigail Rourke |
| Anita Rattan | Beatrice Harvey (Substitute) |

Observers: Mark Sutton

Also in attendance: Will Wilkes, Tim Moss, Anthony Humphreys, Jo Galt and Helen Phillips

Apologies: Jane Rutherford, Richard Osborne, Wendy Whelan, Philip Tapp, Kirsty Rogers, Liz Threlkeld, Keith Hollins, Julie Rudge, Wendy Keeble and Alison Parr

PART ONE

73. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

74. Dedicated Schools Grant Funding for Early Help

At its meeting of 17 October 2019, the Schools Forum had approved up to £1.448m of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding for Historic Commitments be retained centrally for Early Help. The Government has announced a reduction in funding of 20% for Historic Commitments for 2020/2021, and its intention to further reduce this funding in future years.

It was possible to protect a reduction in total DSG funding by delegating historic commitment funding to schools at least a year in advance of the historic commitment funding reduction. This would ensure the funding was in the schools' block baseline for 2021/2022. In order to protect total DSG funding the budget for Early Help would be reduced to £1m for 2020/2021 and an additional £448k would be delegated to schools.

The Early Help service was funded by contributions from DSG, Building Resilient Families and Communities (BRFC) funding and from the Children's Centre budget. Further funding for BRFC had been confirmed by central government for 2020/2021 and it was expected that for the next two years costs would be covered through the BRFC contract. However this was not a long term solution and in the third year (2022/23) an

alternative mechanism would be needed for Early Help Support and discussions would take place between schools and commissioners to find a solution.

RESOLVED – That the reduction in DSG funding for Early Help be noted.

75. Centrally Retained Element of Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant 2020/21

[Matt Biggs, Childcare and Sufficiency Manager, in attendance for this item.]

At their meeting of 17 October 2019 the Schools Forum had received the report: “Schools Budget 2020-21: De-delegation, Central Expenditure and Education Functions” and had been asked to approve the central expenditure in respect of central support services for providers of early years. Following the introduction of the Early Years Funding Formula, central overheads had been limited to 5% of the Early Years Block Funding for 3 and 4 year olds. For 2020-21, the authority was asking for £1.8m (4.2%) to be retained centrally. Forum Members had asked for more detail on how this funding would be used so they were able to make an informed decision on this issue.

The Schools Forum now received details of the centrally retained element which supported Staffordshire County Council in meeting their statutory duties as set out in the Childcare Act 2006 and 2016 for Early Education and Childcare. The retained funding supported back office management/administration and the Entrust Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) for Early Years. The Forum received details of the commissioned work and the performance achieved.

It was clarified that school cluster groups were included in the Entrust SDA and therefore there was no cost to schools for attending these.

Members thanked officers for the detail within the report. They heard that from the Entrust SDA of £1m, there were 78 grant funded moderation visits (25% of the 312 schools), 840 quality liaison visits and 700 business support/market development visits. Members noted that quality liaison visits were prioritised for newly registered settings and those graded as Requires Improvement (RI) and Inadequate.

It was noted that Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) settings saw no benefit from the moderation element of the SDA. Members shared concerns at the lack of funding and the difficulties this presented for all settings, but particularly for smaller Early Years settings. They queried the business support and market development element of the funding and noted that a large proportion of this work was around the development of places to ensure sufficiency.

Whilst accepting that Staffordshire was working well and noting the recent National Audit Office visit resulting from the good uptake within the County, Members wanted to highlight the real concerns caused by underfunding. Despite the funding pressures Staffordshire had not seen a reduction in places. Although there had been approximately 20 setting closures in the last year, 15 of these had been taken over by other providers. However, concerns were shared over the lack of funding. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People had raised these concerns with Staffordshire MPs, in particular Staffordshire’s underfunding in comparison to other LAs. The intention

was to write to the Secretary of State for Education after the General Election to highlight the continued concerns.

Further discussion on this was scheduled for the January Forum meeting, with “Early Years 2018/2019 Underspend and 2019/20 Forecast” on the work programme. A working group of Forum Members would also be established to consider this issue and Members were asked to indicate if they wished to take part in this work at the conclusion of the meeting.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) utilisation of the centrally retained element of Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant 2020-21 be approved; and
- b) a working group be established to consider Early Years funding.

76. Work Programme

Members noted that the establishment of a working group on the Early Years funding rate for 2021, with Members indicating if they wish to be part of this work at the conclusion of the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the Schools Forum Work Programme be noted.

77. Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED - That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 indicated below.

PART TWO

The Committee then proceeded to consider reports on the following issues:

78. High Needs Block 0.5% Transfer

(Exemption paragraph 3)

Chairman