

ST. HELENS COUNCIL
SCHOOLS FORUM

Draft minutes of the Meeting of the Schools Forum
Held on Thursday 14th January 2021 at 4.30 p.m. via Teams

Members:

Primary School Head Teachers

- Mr D McCann, The Federation of St Mary's Catholic Schools
- *Mrs S Birchall, Corpus Christi Catholic Primary
- Mr I Wellens, Bleak Hill Primary
- Mrs A Hymers, St Mary's Birchley
- *Mrs D Holcroft, Grange Valley Primary/Wargrave CE Primary

Secondary School Head Teachers and Representatives

- *Mr A Rannard, De La Salle
- *Mrs C Twist, St Cuthbert's Catholic High School

Special School Head Teacher

- *Mr W Brooks, Mill Green

Primary School Governors

- *Mr W Leatherbarrow, Birchley St Mary's Catholic Primary
- *Ms A Wardell, Willow Tree Primary
- *Mr F Taylor, Eccleston Lane Ends Primary
- *Ms L Moore, Broad Oak/Bleak Hill Primary
- *Cllr T Long, Carr Mill Primary

Secondary School Governors

- *Ms S Begum, Cowley International College

Special School Governor

- *Mr W Bradbury, Mill Green School

Nursery School Head Teacher/Governor

- *Ms E Nicholson, Rainhill Nursery

14-19 Partnership

- *Ms M Williams, Carmel College

Union Representative

- *Mr B McConnell

PVI Early Years Provider Representative

- *Ms H Lomas, Little Explorers Nursery, Rainford

Diocesan and Archdiocesan Representative

Vacant

Academy Representatives

- *Mr S Hughes, Hope Academy
- *Ms K Sawe, The Three Saints Academy Trust
- *Mr R Owens, Rainhill Learning Village Multi Academy Trust
- *Ms K Knowles, Rainford High School
- Vacant

PRU Representative

- *Ms Rachel Guyer, PRU

Elected Member Observer

*Councillor K Groucutt

*Denotes Members Present

Also Present: Mr G Tyrer, Business Support Manager
Mr S Webb, Finance Manager
Mrs J Davies, Senior Assistant Director, Education & Children's Health
Mr A Chisnall, Assistant Director, Integrated Support Services
Mrs D Gilchrist, Principal Accountant for Schools

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Wellens, Mrs Hymers and Mr McCann.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 24th September 2020

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were no matters arising

Mr Leatherbarrow thanked everyone working in the school community for their hard work supporting schools across the borough during this difficult period.

5. School budget and Early Years Funding 2021/22

Mr Tyrer confirmed that there are no fundamental changes to the school funding arrangements for the next financial year. He referred to the Authority Pro-forma Tool (APT) which sets out the local funding formula for St Helens and how the funding is distributed to schools. Local Authorities are required to submit the APT to the Department for Education (DfE) by 21st Jan 2021. Mr Tyrer explained that there is still no date for a hard National Funding Formula to be introduced, but indications were that it would not be before 2024/25. The DfE may issue consultations before this date in relation to school funding arrangements.

The APT is set out at Appendix 1a, and Appendix 1b sets out the detailed school budget figures. Mr Tyrer reminded the Schools Forum that the APT does not cover all of the funding that makes up a school budget, it excludes SEND funding and Early Years funding for nursery class provision.

Section 3 of the report summarises the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) settlement which was received just before Christmas. The settlement shows an increase of £13m from 2020/21. The Teachers' Pay Grant (TPG) and Teachers' Pension Employers Contribution Grant (TPECG) will cease next financial year and the funds brought into the DSG which accounts for an increase of £5.5m. There is extra money due to an increase in pupil numbers and additional new money in the baseline. Minimum funding levels for schools have been confirmed and are included in budget shares.

Mr Tyrer explained that a small allocation of TPG and TPECG will still come through as a separate grant relating to early years pupils – the Local Authority are still awaiting details for this.

The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) has been retained at 1.84%, and £689k has been earmarked for the growth fund.

Mr Tyrer confirmed that there will be no change to Pupil Premium rates, though the DfE will now use Oct 2020 census data rather than Jan data.

The Central School Services Block (CSSB) includes a small element which is allocated to Local Authorities for central school costs. St Helens had an allocation in this block for historical commitments which was managed centrally on behalf of maintained schools. Recent funding changes has meant that the DfE no longer recognise historical commitments and therefore this will be removed from the funding allocation. Non-Voluntary Aided schools will no longer have larger costs of repairs picked up by the Local Authority, and these costs will need to be met from Delegated Budgets. Voluntary Aided schools are not affected.

Service contracts e.g. legionella will continue to be funded in the next financial year, but discussions will need to be had with schools for the year after.

Mr Tyrer explained that schools as a phase need to decide whether they wish to continue to de-delegate funds to the Local Authority to provide certain services; or retain the funds and provide the services themselves. Appendix 3 sets out the services which can be de-delegated. Academies are not part of the de-delegation arrangements.

Mr Tyrer explained that the Early Years funding is subject to amendment as this is based on termly headcounts. Section 7.4 of the report sets out how the funding will be allocated to early years providers. Mr Tyrer confirmed that there is extra funding in the system this year which will be passported to providers in the hourly rates.

Recommendations are set out at section 8 of the report.

Mr Rannard queried if the Pay Grants which had been transferred to the DSG are at the same rate as 20/21. Mr Tyrer confirmed that they are at the same rate.

Mrs Holcroft asked if the de-delegation arrangements could be amended due to some schools using other systems besides Capita SIMS. Mr Tyrer explained that it was too late to give notice for leaving the contract with Capita for 2021/22, but that if maintained schools no longer required the SIMS package then a discussion would be needed for 2022/23. If schools decide not to de-delegate the licences and subscriptions next year, and retain the funding, schools could make their own arrangement for licences or a combined arrangement could continue. Mr Tyrer stated that it would be more difficult if schools wanted to use a range of different suppliers, and the Local Authority may then take the view that schools would need to make their own arrangements. The actual costs for individual contracts may then be more expensive.

Mrs Holcroft stated that she would also like to look at a different financial system. Mr Tyrer explained that the Local Authority would still need to check any financial system as schools' income and expenditure form part of the Council's accounts, and so the Director of Finance would need assurance on any finance system used by schools.

Mr Leatherbarrow requested that this issue is discussed at headteacher meetings so that it is not too late to make any changes again next year.

Mr Bradbury raised a concern that if early years children do not attend their setting then funding will be reduced. Mr Tyrer explained that the guidance received from the DfE before Christmas was written before the current lockdown arrangements. Early years settings are expected to be open, but many parents have decided not to send their children. The DfE have stated that for census purposes schools and early years settings are expected to record attendance rather than children registered which would lead to a significant reduction in income. Further clarification from the DfE had been received today, which indicated that children who are registered at settings and would have attended if Covid had not happened should be recorded on the census. Mr Tyrer confirmed that the detail was still being looked at and would be communicated to all schools as soon as possible.

Mr Taylor queried if there was any information on capital allocations. Mr Tyrer confirmed that no allocations had been received yet but that he wouldn't expect any significant increase on previous years allocations.

Mr Taylor asked if there had been any announcements regarding additional funding for digital infrastructure. Mr Tyrer confirmed that there had been no new funding streams yet, though the government had provided laptops for certain pupil cohorts.

Mr Leatherbarrow referred to the additional funding announced relating to exceptional costs for Covid, and queried if a second claims window would be opened shortly. Mr Tyrer explained that there had already been two claims windows for additional costs relating to Covid, but only for costs incurred during the summer term. Schools had been contacted to encourage them to claim any costs that they had not claimed the first time around.

Mr Tyrer explained that there had been a new grant announced last term for additional staff costs relating to Covid, though the detail on how schools can claim had not yet been released.

The Schools Forum:

- Noted the contents of the report
- Approved the APT for submission to the DfE
- Confirmed the utilisation of the CSSB
- Confirmed de-delegation arrangements on the same basis as last year for primaries and secondaries
- Approved the allocation of the 2021/22 early years block and funding rates

9. Any other business

Cllr Groucutt echoed the Chair's earlier comments, understands the daily challenges that schools are facing and thanked everyone for their hard work. Cllr Groucutt hopes to be able to visit a lot of schools at some time in the future and looks forward to working with everyone.

Mr Leatherbarrow thanked Mr Tyrer and his team for their hard work and continued support at this difficult time.

10. Date and time of next meeting

Thursday 4th March 2021 at 4.30pm