

LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting scheduled for 24 March 2020

Due to the COVID-19 situation this meeting was cancelled and the business was undertaken using the Forum's electronic urgent business procedure.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Not applicable.

2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Not applicable.

3. FORUM MEMBERSHIP

It was noted that Brendan Hassett has resigned from the Forum and thanks for his contribution to the Forum were recorded.

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting held on 14 January 2020 were circulated to members.

5. MATTERS ARISING

Information was provided in connection with item 7ix Academy Access to LCC Vacancy Site, to indicate that confirmation has been received from BTLS that Academies within Lancashire who do not purchase BT Lancashire Services Payroll and Recruitment can now advertise on the Lancashire Teaching/ Non-Teaching vacancy site. Academies will be charged £100 per advert. A communication has been sent via a Schools Portal posting to Academy Headteachers

6. APPRENTICESHIP LEVY UPDATE

A presentation by the Apprenticeship Levy Team updating members on Schools Apprenticeship Levy issues will be rearranged for another time. A brief summary of the current position provided by the Apprenticeship Levy Team was circulated to members.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SCHOOLS BLOCK WORKING GROUP

A report was provided setting out the recommendations from the Schools Block Working Group held on 10 March 2020, and brief updates were provided on any developments since the meeting as part of a supplementary paper.

i. Schools Block Budget

This report provided an update on the finalisation of the Schools Budget 2020/21, other government funding announcements for 2020/21 and on early information about possible school funding developments in 2021/22 and beyond.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the information provided;*
- b) Asked to be kept informed of future developments.*

ii. *School Resource Management Adviser (SRMA)*

This report provided an update and the latest SRMA developments, including reports from SMRA visits in Lancashire and the published ESFA report on the School Resource Management Adviser Pilot evaluation.

*The Working Group:
Noted the report.*

iii. *Inclusion Hub Funding*

This report provided information on the methodology for distributing Inclusion Hub funding to districts in 2020/21, which included a pupil numbers and deprivation factor.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report;*
- b) *Asked that information be requested in relation to the primary inclusion hub impact and any secondary sector developments.*

iv. *High Needs Block Provision Task and Finish Group Report*

A brief verbal update was provided for the working group, which indicated that work on the Task and Finish Group work themes was continuing, with many tasks now embedded in ongoing county council processes.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the information provided.*
- b) *Welcomed the work that was continuing around the HNB T&F group themes as part of the ongoing work of the county council.*

v. *Embedding System Leadership*

This report provided information about 'Defining a new relationship with schools - Embedding System Leadership'.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the information provided.*
- b) *Asked that a link to the new website be circulated to members*

Colleagues leading on the Embedding System Leadership were due to attend the Forum, but this will have to be rearranged. In the meantime a link to the new system led school improvement model website is available [here](#)

Using the electronic Urgent Business Procedure, the Forum ratified the Working Group's recommendations.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE HIGH NEEDS BLOCK WORKING GROUP

A report was provided setting out the recommendations from the High Needs Block Working Group held on 5 March 2020, and brief updates were provided on any developments since the meeting as part of a supplementary paper.

i. *High Needs Commissioned Places*

Following comments received in the last Schools Budget setting round, the LA has been reviewing the communication process around commissioned place numbers.

The Working Group:

- a) *Welcomed the proposed earlier communication process around commissioned places.*

ii. *High Needs Block Funding*

This report provided an update on the finalisation of the Schools Budget 2020/21, other government funding announcements for 2020/21 and on early information about possible high needs funding developments in 2021/22 and beyond.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the information provided.*

iii. *Developing the Approach and Provision for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities*

The LCC Cabinet approved a number of recommendations arising from a report titled 'Developing the Approach and Provision for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities'. The role of the Forum and the HNB Working Group were formally set out in the strategy.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report;*
- b) *Welcomed the formal strategy agreed by Cabinet and the identified links to the Schools Forum and High Needs Block Working Group which are set out in the Funding and Governance section of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Sufficiency Strategy 2019 – 2024;*
- c) *Welcomed the additional places being offered in the Lancaster area, but also asked that the use of the former Skerton High School site be considered as a possible location to provide additional high needs places in the area;*
- d) *Asked what plans the county council may have for the Broadfield School site, if the school moved into the former Hameldon School premises;*
- e) *Enquired about the responses from mainstream schools to the request for expressions of interest to develop special educational needs units and asked for any further information around the funding of such units;*
- f) *Acknowledged that Inclusion Service colleagues were tied up with preparations for the OfSTED inspection so were unable to attend the March HNB meeting, but asked if the service could ensure representation at future meetings, and wondered if there was a possibility of someone being available at the Schools Forum meeting on 24 March 2020 to respond to the queries raised.*

Inclusion Service colleagues were hoping to attend the meeting on the 24th, but this will have to be rearranged. Brief information was provided by the service in response to the Skerton High school site, the Broadfield site and the Expressions of Interest process for special educational needs units in mainstream schools.

iv. *High Needs Block Provision Task and Finish Group Report*

A brief verbal update was provided for the working group, which indicated that work on the Task and Finish Group work themes was continuing, with many tasks now embedded in ongoing county council processes.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the information provided.*
- b) *Welcomed the work that was continuing around the HNB T&F group themes as part of the ongoing work of the county council;*
- c) *Asked if it were possible for the Schools Forum to receive a brief update on 24 March around the specific T&F group themes and the involvement of Forum members;*

Updates on High Needs Block Task and Finish Group will need to be rearranged for a future meeting.

v. *Embedding System Leadership*

This report provided information about 'Defining a new relationship with schools - Embedding System Leadership'.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report;*
- b) *Supported the educational vision behind the developments and the information provided at events throughout the county;*
- c) *Commented that it may have been preferable to host combined Headteacher and CoG events to ensure representatives from a school received an identical message;*
- d) *Acknowledged that there would always be uncertainties around any transition to a revised system/service offer;*
- e) *Welcomed the involvement of cross sector school representatives on the Steering Group and the intention to introduce a newsletter and website to aid communication of key issues;*
- f) *Requested that the names of the Steering Group representatives be published so that schools knew who to contact if they had queries or comments to feed into the process;*
- g) *Commented that there was a perception that schools buying into the SSG would be subsidising the cost of the networks for schools that chose not to buy SSG from Lancashire;*
- h) *Asked if information could be provided around the financial aspects of the new networks and the SSG offer;*
- i) *Asked if someone would be available to attend the Schools Forum on 24 March to respond to the queries raised.*

Colleagues leading on the Embedding System Leadership were due to attend the Forum, but this will have to be rearranged. A link to the latest information was provided earlier in the Schools Block.

Using the electronic Urgent Business Procedure, the Forum ratified the Working Group's recommendations.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EARLY YEARS BLOCK WORKING GROUP

A report was provided setting out the recommendations from the Early Years Block Working Group held on 25 February 2020, and brief updates were provided on any developments since the meeting as part of a supplementary paper.

i. SEN Inclusion Fund

As requested at the last Working Group, updated SEN Inclusion Fund information had been re-circulated.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the information.*

ii. Supplementary Claims Process for Maintained Settings

Following discussion at the last meeting, arrangements have been made to introduce a second supplementary payment opportunity for maintained settings from 2020/21.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the information.*

iii. Early Years Block Funding

This report provided an update on the finalisation of the Schools Budget 2020/21, other government funding announcements for 2020/21 and on early information about possible early years funding developments in 2021/22 and beyond.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the report and the final 2020/21 financial year funding decisions;*
- b) Recommended that future communications about EY funding rates highlighted that deprivation supplements continued to be paid in addition to base rates.*

iv. Future of Maintained Nursery Schools

Information was provided in connection with a report presented to the LCC Cabinet about the future of maintained nursery schools.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the report.*

v. Payments for Social Services Supported Children

An update report on progress to revise procedures for payments for social services supported children, was presented.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the report;*
- b) Welcomed the proposed introduction of the revised proforma and funding arrangements for social services supported children.*

vi. *Local Government Association (LGA) Early Years Peer Review*

A Local Government Association (LGA) Early Years Peer Review has been arranged in Lancashire on the 24th-27th March 2020. The Peer Review Team undertake a number of visits, meetings and focus groups with key groups/individuals.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report;*
- b) *Relevant members were encouraged to participate in the peer Review process.*

Due to COVID-19 considerations the early years peer review process has been postponed and will be rearranged for a later date.

vii. *EY Sustain*

The Chair provided a brief update on 'ey sustain' a registered charity with funds to provide free financial and business consultancy to Early Years settings in Lancashire in the private, voluntary and independent sector.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report.*
- b) *Requested that a copy of the NDNA document be forwarded to members.*

Subsequent to the meeting the relevant NDNA document on ratios was circulated to EY group members.

Using the electronic Urgent Business Procedure, the Forum ratified the Working Group's recommendations.

10.RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHAIR'S WORKING GROUP

A background paper was provided for the Forum in connection with the Schools in Financial Difficulty budget and a bid for a one-off financial allocation.

A meeting of the Chair's Working Group was due to be held in advance of the Forum on 24 March, but this was cancelled and detailed information was provided via email to members of the group. Some supplementary questions were raised, but all those responding supported the bid.

The Chair's Working Group recommended that an allocation of £243,000 be made from the Schools in Financial Difficulty budget to assist with the recovery at a Lancashire secondary school.

Using the electronic Urgent Business Procedure, the Forum ratified the Working Group's recommendations.

11.FORUM CORRESPONDENCE

A copy of a letter from Preston City Council to the Forum about 'academisation in Preston' was shared with members, along with some possible comments to inform a response from the Forum Chair.

Using the electronic Urgent Business Procedure, the Forum ratified the Forum response to the correspondence received.

12. URGENT BUSINESS

Background information was provided in connection with the use of the urgent business procedure to obtain feedback from the Apprenticeship Levy Steering Group on a pressing matter around the Apprenticeship Levy Protocol for the Transfer of Schools Funding. This was because Apprenticeship Levy funding was now being returned to central government.

The Group supported the proposed 'transfer' protocol but asked that the Apprenticeship Levy Steering Group be kept updated on the allocation of funds, in particular information about any allocations to and more detail around 'Organisations providing support to school'.

Having reviewed the responses, the Apprenticeship Levy Team will proceed with the schools levy transfer arrangements, but due to the uncertainties expressed, will not now include 'Organisations providing support to schools' in the eligible categories. This group remain eligible for support from transfers from the LCC levy.

Using the electronic Urgent Business Procedure, the Forum ratified the Steering Group's recommendations.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Three items of AOB were presented to the Forum seeking views on matters that related to the impact of COVID-19.

a) Early Education Funding (EEF) – Summer Term 2020 Payment Proposals

Government announcements in response to COVID-19 include confirmation that Early Education Funding will continue in the event that settings close. However, the county council is concerned that there is a significant risk to the sustainability of the PVI childcare sector if the LA is unable to pay providers in a timely way as a result of either staff shortages due to COVID19 sickness, or home working, which can impact on system speeds and reliability.

In response, a revised payment process for the summer term EEF payments, and subsequent terms if necessary, to mitigate this issue has been proposed. The paper set out more details of the proposed approach, which had the support of the Director of Education and Skills and the Director of Finance.

The Chair of the Early Years Working Block Group was supportive of the proposals, and to provide reassurance to the sector, the revised arrangements have been communicated to providers.

Using the electronic Urgent Business Procedure, the Forum ratified the Early Education Funding (EEF) payment proposals.

The Chair of the Early Years Block Working Group formally expressed thanks to Mel Foster and members of the Early Years Delivery Team for their efforts to deliver this funding to Early Years settings across the county that prevented any delays in processing and also provided

some certainty for settings during a very uncertain time. The team also delivered the funding ahead of the contracted payment date despite home working and all the issues that created.

The Chair of the Early Years has sent a letter to the Early Years Delivery Team to express thanks for the work undertaken and also the support provided by the Director of Education and Skills and the Director of Finance.

b) Clawback of balances at 31 March 2020

The Forum have previously agreed the clawback policy that would apply at 31 March 2020. However it was noted that there is a possibility that the current COVID-19 situation may impact on the year end procedures for some schools and the county council, including schools unable to complete normal year end closure processes by the published deadlines, backlogs in the county council around processing payments, possible government instructions around council priorities etc. Capital projects at some schools, which were due to be completed by year end, have also be delayed pushing payments back into the new financial year.

As individual school year end accounts may be affected by this, the Forum Chair has asked that the views of members be sought on a proposal to suspend the application of clawback at 31 March 2020.

Using the electronic Urgent Business Procedure, the Forum supported the suspension of clawback on school balances at 31 March 2020.

c) Supply Cover Insurance and Maternity Scheme for Lancashire Schools and COVID-19

A number of COVID-19 related questions relating to the Lancashire supply scheme rules had been received. A copy of the proposed rule applications were provided for the Forum to consider.

Using the electronic Urgent Business Procedure, the Forum supported the proposed Supply Scheme COVID-19 rule applications.

14. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next scheduled Forum meeting will be held at 10.00am Thursday 2 July 2020 at County Hall, Preston, subject to COVID-19 implications.