

LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Date of meeting 2 July 2020

Item No 9

Title: Recommendations of the High Needs Block Working Group

Executive Summary

In June 2020, the High Needs Block Working Group considered a number of reports using the Urgent Business Procedure, including:

- Developing the Approach and Provision for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities;
- Schools Budget Outturn, School Balances and Clawback 2019/20;
- Schools Forum Annual Report 2019/20;
- Urgent Business Outcomes - Supply Scheme update and alternatives to May 2020 schools census;
- Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution Grant (TPECG) Claim from supplementary fund for specialist settings;
- Charging for the Operation of Schools Local Bank Account.

Recommendations

The Forum is asked to:

- a) Note the report from the June 2020 High Needs Block Working Group;
- b) Ratify the Group's recommendations.

Background

In June 2020, the High Needs Block Working Group considered a number of reports using the Urgent Business Procedure. 12 responses were received, which have been collated to form the Working Group's recommendations. A summary of the key issues and recommendations are provided in this report.

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

Previous information to the working group welcomed this formal strategy agreed by Cabinet but asked some supplementary questions. Responses from the Inclusion Service included the following, which were shared with the Schools Forum in March 2020:

- Costings relating to the refurbishment of the Skerton High school site were obtained, but costs were prohibitive and would have needed to utilise a significant proportion of the capital funding available, so other projects were deemed a higher priority;
- There are no plans at present in relation to the Broadfield site;
- Expressions of Interest in connection with special educational needs units in mainstream schools were due to close on 20 March 2020, and no decisions have yet been taken in response to submissions. The timescales may also need to be reconsidered in the light of COVID-19.

Since the Forum meeting responses have been collated in connection with the Expressions of Interest (Eol) for the Additionally Resources Mainstream Schools (ARMS). 7 Eol were received from primary schools and no Eol were received from the secondary sector. The LA has been looking to evaluate and progress matters with the primary school volunteers, where appropriate.

The closing date for school responses coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19 and this may have impacted on the number of Eol received. A further communication is now to be sent out to mainstream schools providing information on the gaps that remain in provision following the first round of responses, and seeking additional volunteers.

There have been no further developments in connection with the Skerton or Broadfield sites.

The Working Group:

a) Noted the report

2. Schools Budget Outturn, School Balances and Clawback 2019/20

Information and recommendations are incorporated in the report at item 6 Schools Budget Outturn, School Balances and Clawback 2019/20.

3. Schools Forum Annual Report 2019/20

Information and recommendations are incorporated in the report at item 7 Schools Forum Annual Report 2019/20.

4. Urgent Business Outcomes - Supply Scheme update and alternatives to May 2020 schools census

On 20 May 2020, a request was distributed to members of the Schools Forum, using the Forum's Urgent Business Procedure. This request sought urgent views over 2 matters, relating to:

- an update on the operation of the Lancashire supply scheme;
- actions to be taken in response to the Government's decision to cancel the summer term 2020 school census for High Needs Block pupils (Views have already been sought in connection with Early Years Block funding).

Members were asked to respond by the end Friday 22 May 2020 and by the closing date, 25 responses had been received. All responses supported both proposals without amendment, but two responses included comments and responses were provided to these members.

Both the proposals were supported by Director for Education and Skills.

Arrangements have now been made to implement the decisions:

- The Supply Cover Insurance policy update allows schools to claim for staff that are self isolating or shielding due to COVID-19, where the school can demonstrate that they are incurring additional costs which could not be met by other flexible working options available at the current time. Under normal operation, the scheme only reimburses schools for sickness absence. Further information has now been issued to schools.
- The agreed alternative data sources are being implemented to replace the information from the now cancelled May 2020 school census to enable summer term funding redeterminations to be calculated. Slightly different methodologies have been agreed for different sectors, to reflect the needs of each phase. Arrangements are now taking place to collect and calculate the data.

The Working Group:

a) Noted the report.

Subsequent to the meeting clarification has been provided about the Alternative Provision arrangements to confirm that the Summer term 2019 actuals will be used as the baseline for the PRU summer term 2020 redeterminations. A local PRU census request was issued in early June 2020 to collate the latest pupil data for each PRU, including information about any pupils that may be attending due to COVID-19. This data will be shared with finance to ensure that there are no schools at risk of a large negative impact from the use of summer term 2019 data. For the summer term 2020 redeterminations, all PRUs will receive funding based on the actual NOR at May 2019 as a minimum.

5. Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution Grant (TPECG) Claim from supplementary fund for specialist settings

Previous reports to the Forum have referred to the increase in the employer contribution rate of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) from 16.4% to 23.6% that was introduced from September 2019.

DfE allocated funding, calculated on a formulaic methodology, to all schools to cover the costs of this pensions increase, and made available a Supplementary Fund, to which schools could bid, if their grant allocation fell short of their actual pension cost by more than 0.05% of their overall budget for the period.

Mainstream schools had to submit an application to the Supplementary Fund on an individual basis, by 17 January 2020. However, the DfE indicated that the bid for 'specialist schools', which included special schools and academies, PRUs and alternative provision academies, must be submitted as a single claim by the LA, together with any costs for teaching staff employed centrally by the LA.

The initial announcements from DfE indicated that this process would commence in April 2020, but the notifications about the claim procedure were only received on 4 May 2020 and had to be returned to the DfE by 31 May 2020.

Responses were received from all specialist institutions, and relevant county council services, and the return was submitted by the DfE deadline.

The LA would like to thank all schools and academies for responding to the LA with information necessary to complete this return, especially as it coincided with other COVID-19 related pressures that schools would be tackling.

The DfE will be validating the return and information will be provided to schools once further information is received.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the report.**

6. Charging for the Operation of Schools Local Bank Account

In October 2019, the Forum supported revised bank account charges being introduced from April 2020.

The revised charges for 2020/21 are:

- Set up a new school bank account –Charge £1,000.
- Annual maintenance charge for operating a school bank account - Charge £500

The 2019/20 charges were:

- £500 to set up a new school bank account;
- £350 annual maintenance charge for operating a school bank account.

In reviewing the charges for the 2020/21 financial year, some key factors the Forum considered were:

- In recent years, schools establishing a bank account have needed considerable additional support over and above that originally envisaged in setting the charge. This has particularly involved additional work for Schools Financial Service (SFS) staff to visit the schools and rectify problems and ensure that relevant returns are submitted to the County Council, as required by the Scheme for Financing Schools;
- The maintenance charge is still not achieving full cost recovery.

In response to the original reports, members had sought clarification of the services provided, which included reconciling local bank records into the county council's accounts, investigation and correction of errors, reconciling payroll, ensuring completion of statutory VAT returns, offering support and guidance etc.

The 2020/21 charges are due to be issued in June 2020 to bank account schools and the accompanying notification will specify that the revised charges were agreed with the Forum. This report acts as a reminder of the discussions if Forum members are contacted about the decision from October 2019.

The Working Group:

- a) **Noted the report.**