

LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT 10:00 A.M. ON TUESDAY 13 JANUARY 2022
(Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams)**

Present:

Schools Members:

Primary School Governors

Stephen Booth
Gerard Collins
Laurence Upton
Robert Waring
Karen Stephens
Tim Young

Primary School Headteachers

Sarah Barton
Jenny Birkin
Neil Gurman
Deanne Marsh
Steve McLoughlin
Sarah Robson
Keith Wright

Secondary School Governors

Janice Astley
John Davey
Gill Donohoe
Jackie Lord
Nicola Regan
Brian Rollo

Secondary School Headteachers

Ivan Catlow
Mike Wright

Nursery School Headteacher

Jan Holmes

Nursery School Governor

Early Years - PVI

Peter Hindle
Philippa Perks

Academy Governor

Kathleen Cooper
Helen Dicker
Louise Shaw

Academy Principal/Headteacher

Matt Eastham
Gaynor Gorman
James Keulemans
Alan Porteous
John Tarbox

Alternative Provision Academy

Holly Clarke

Special School Academy

Special School Governor

Mandy Howarth

Special School Headteacher

Shaun Jukes – Forum Chair

Short Stay Governor

Liz Laverty

Short Stay Headteacher

Abigale Bowe

Members:

Other Voting Members

CC Anne Cheetham
Rosie Fearn
Bill Mann

Observers

CC Michael Goulthorp
Lee Baines (NASUWT)
Andrew Murray
Joanna Potter
Sarah Troughton (NEU)
Sam Ud-din (LASGB)
Nicola Whyte

In attendance: James Beardwood
Paul Bonser
Vanessa Carthy
Matt Dexter
Millie Dixon
Victoria Lowton
Emma Nicholson
Kevin Smith

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cathryn Antwis, Julie Bell, Thelma Cullen, Sharon Fenton, Lydia Mannion, Pita Oates, Michelle O'Neill, Louise Parrish and Claire Thompson

2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Substitute members were welcomed to the meeting:

- Abigale Bowe, head at Shaftesbury House attended for Jane Eccleston on behalf of PRUs
- Steven McLoughlin DHT attended behalf of Cathryn Antwis, Headteacher from Frenchwood Community Primary School

3. FORUM MEMBERSHIP

A report was presented setting out the membership changes since the last meeting:

Special School Governor Representative

Due to governance changes at her school, Laura Brennan was no longer eligible to be the special school governor representative on the Forum.

The LA sought candidates to fill the vacancy and 3 nominations were received. An election process was therefore undertaken at the end of the autumn term 2021.

13 votes were cast in the election, representing a 45% turnout. Mandy Howarth, a governor at Acorns Primary School, received 54% of the votes cast and has been appointed to the Forum.

Secondary School Headteacher Representative

Julie Langham, School Business Manager from Haslingden High School has recently resigned from the Forum.

Julie was representing Secondary School Headteachers and Nicola Regan, Headteacher from Millfield Science and Performing Arts College has been appointed as new representative.

Forum Membership Numbers

The Schools Forum regulations require that the balance of Forum membership for maintained primary schools, maintained secondary schools and academies is reviewed to ensure that the number of Forum representatives in these groups is proportionate to the pupil populations across the schools. Now that the final October 2021 census numbers are available, the Forum membership had been reviewed against the latest pupil data and an analysis is provided in the report.

No immediate change to the membership balance was required based on the latest pupil data. However, the county council is aware that there are a number of academy conversions planned during 2022 and will keep the membership balance under review ahead of the annual membership refresh for September 2022.

The Forum:

- a) Noted the report;**
- b) Welcomed Mandy Howarth and Nicola Regan to the Forum;**
- c) Thanked Laura Brennan and Julie Langham for their contributions to the Forum.**

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting, held on 19 October 2021, were agreed as a correct record

5. MATTERS ARISING

From item 8 Team Around the Schools and Setting (TASS)

At the last meeting, members noted the TASS update and asked that further presentations be made to future meetings. Following discussions with the Chair, TASS colleagues have been asked to attend the March Forum meeting, to ensure that budget considerations take priority at the January meeting.

The Forum:

- a) Noted the matters arising.**

6. CONSIDERATION OF THE SCHOOLS BUDGET 2022/23

- a) Schools Budget 2022/23**
- b) Schools Block Transfer Consultation – Analysis and Responses**
- c) Recommendations from the Forum Chair's Group Budget Meeting**
- d) Formal Forum Decisions relating to the Schools Budget 2022/23**

The Forum consider the 4 Schools Budget sub items as a single report.

A report was presented setting out information about the Schools Budget for 2022/23. This included information from the original report to the Forum and subsequent information from the Chairs' Working Group meeting held on 11 January 2022 and the responses to the

consultation on a possible Schools Block transfer. The overall DSG allocations were provided as set out in the table below and the report provided further details on how the funding blocks were calculated using the DfE's national funding formulae.

Forecast DSG Income	£m's
Schools Block	878.278
High Needs Block	166.908
Early Years Block	80.655
Central Schools Services Block	6.838
Gross Total forecast DSG Income	1,132.679
Total deduction for national schools non-domestic rates	- 8.338
Total deductions for direct high needs payments made by the ESFA	- 8.604
Net Total forecast DSG Income	1,115.737

It was noted that in aggregate terms the 2022/23 Gross DSG allocation is some £42m higher than that received in 2021/22. This increase is due to:

- Lancashire's share of the increased £2.3b funding nationally made available by Government, including £780m for the High Needs Block
- Lancashire's share of the increased £170m nationally for the Early Years Block
- An increase in the overall numbers of pupils in Lancashire compared to 2021/22, although figures in the early years sector are now declining

An initial estimated of the Schools Budget 2022/23 was also provided, as set out in the table below:

Forecast DSG Expenditure	£m's
Schools Block	876.598
High Needs Block	168.588
Early Years Block	81.655
Central Schools Services Block	6.838
Total deduction for national schools non-domestic rates	- 8.338
Total deductions for direct high needs payments made by the ESFA	- 8.604
Total forecast DSG Expenditure	1,116.737

The Schools Budget proposals forecast a balanced Dedicated Schools Grant funding position in 2022/23, subject to the planned use of £1m in Schools Budget reserves to mitigate transitional pressures in the Early Years Block budget

The presentation also provided information on Lancashire's share of the Schools Supplementary Grant 2022/23, as set out below:

Mainstream Schools Supplementary Grant allocation	£25m
High Needs Supplementary Grant allocation	£6m
Total Supplementary Grant allocation	£31m

Initial suggestions were provided around how the high needs supplementary grant may be distributed.

Members considered the information provided and discussed the proposals for each funding block and the Schools Supplementary Grant and made a number of observations and comments, including around the use of the special school site transfer, commissioned place numbers, pressures on the early years sector, and policies being implemented to reduce the 'out-county' expenditure.

The Forum:

- a) Noted the report, including the 2022/23 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations and the budget proposals for each of the 4 funding blocks and the Schools Supplementary Grant allocation for 2022/23;**
- b) Noted the information from the Forum Chairs' Group meeting on 11 January 2022 and the responses from the consultation with schools on the Schools Block transfer proposals;**
- c) Voted on the 2022/23 Schools Budget Proposals, as follows:**

Unanimously supported the Schools Block proposals, as follows:

- Confirm that the DfE's NFF methodology should continue to be used as the Lancashire formula for 2022/23**
- Confirm the 2022/23 MFG set at +2.0%**
- The use of the circa £2.2m of the Growth Fund allocation to ensure that the NFF, MPF and MFG can be applied in full in 2022/23**
- The use of the Minimum Pupil Funding (MPF) rates contained in the NFF for any new Growth Fund allocations from April 2022**
 - Primary £4,265 per pupil**
 - Secondary £5,525 per pupil**
- Unanimously supported the transfer of circa £1.7m (0.19%) of Schools Block funding to the High Needs Block for the revised payment arrangements needed for the contractual school PFI contribution in relation to the former Hameldon site, as it is being taken over by a Lancashire special school;**
- Unanimously supported the disapplication submission to DfE relating to a Lancashire secondary school, as the MFG protection for the school, associated with the loss of the 2021/22 PFI allocation, is not required as the pupils have returned to the main site and the school no longer has a PFI funding commitment.**

Unanimously supported the High Needs Block proposals, as follows:

- The increased HNB allocation being utilised to cover the forecast growth in High Needs expenditure from April 2022**
- The increase in HNB allocations to broadly match uplifts in the mainstream sector, including:**
 - Increasing the Weighted Pupil Numbers (WPN) rate by 4% to £4,567**
 - Special School and PRU School Specific factors uplifted by 2% to match Schools Block MFG**
 - Rate for Excluded Pupils, Medical and Other pupils uplift to match increased WPN**
 - in the secondary PRU formula, 1 WPN**
 - in the primary PRU formula, 2/3 of 1 WPN**

Unanimously supported the Early Years Block proposals, as follows:

- **The use of £1m Schools Budget reserves being used in 2022/23, to mitigate transitional pressures in the Early Years Block budget to support the 3 and 4 year old base rate, as the Schools Block headroom transfer is not available;**
- **The £1m contribution would allow 4p per hour to be added to the base rate and be available for 2022/23 only to support the 3 and 4 years olds, meaning the rate would increase by 13p per hour from 2021/22, providing a £4.48 per hour 3 and 4 years olds rate from April 2022 (compared to £4.35 in 2021/22);**
- **The passporting of other DfE EY funding increases to providers:**
 - **+ £0.21 per hour 2 year olds providing £5.37 per hour from April 2022**
 - **+ £0.17 per hour for the maintained nursery schools supplementary funding providing £3.67 per hour from April 2022**
 - **+ £0.07 per hour for Early Years Pupil Premium providing £0.60 per hour from April 2022, equivalent to up to £342 per eligible child per year**
 - **+ £185 per eligible child the disability access fund (DAF) providing £800 per eligible child per year from April 2022**
- **The continuation of Deprivation Supplements on the existing methodology for 2022/23;**
- **The continuation of the SEN Inclusion Fund at £500k for 2022/23.**

Unanimously supported the Central School Services Block proposals, as follows:

- **The transfer of £0.350m from CSSB to HNB from 2022/23 to enable continued support for MASH and Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service;**
- **The proposals for the Central School Services Block in 2022/23, including uplifts for cost and demand led pressures.**

Unanimously supported the Schools Supplementary Grant 2022/23 proposals, as follows:

- **The proposed mechanisms for allocating the high needs funding supplementary grant in 2022/23:**
 - **Health and Social Care Levy (Increased NI contribution in 2022/23 for social care) - For special schools and AP only, to be calculated on 80% of total budget per school x 1.25% based on 2022/23 School Budget data, with an adjustment for exceptional place changes in year at special schools and increased exclusions at AP later in the year**
 - **Wider costs pressures – Paid across all sectors and calculated on basis of WPNs in 2022/23 School Budget data, estimated at circa £600 per WPN**

Unanimously supported the Dedicated Schools Grant Reserve underwriting the uncertainties around the 2022/23 DSG Schools Budget, across Schools Block, High Needs Block, Early Years Block and CSSB.

d) Unanimously approved the budget lines requiring Forum agreement, as set out below

Function	LA proposals 2022/23	Proposed Expenditure: 2022/23 £m
Consultation on Formula Changes		
No local formula factor changes are proposed for 2022/23 in any funding block, beyond incorporating the DfE National Funding Formula (NFF) alterations into the local Schools Block formula	The Forum have previously agreed to use the DfE's NFF as the Lancashire funding formula for the Schools Block budget, and NFF updates for 2022/23 introduced by the DfE are incorporated in the Schools Budget proposals for 2022/23, including revised sparsity and school business rates factors	
De-delegation for mainstream schools	LA proposals for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools in financial difficulty; • Museum service (primary only); • Staff Costs Public duties/Suspensions; • Primary Inclusion Hubs Approved by the Schools Forum on 19 October 2021	3.468
Movement of up to 0.5% from the schools block to other blocks	Proposal to transfer £1.680m from the School Block to the High so that contractual school PFI contributions can be met from the relevant funding block in 2022/23, when the former Hameldon school premises will be used to permanently relocate a Lancashire special school	1.680
Contracts (where the LA is entering a contract to be funded from the schools budget)	No Proposals at this time	
Financial issues relating to:		
arrangements for pupils with special educational needs, in particular the places to be commissioned by the LA and schools and the arrangements for paying top-up funding	Proposals contained in the High Needs Block Working Group recommendations report to the Forum and the Forum budget papers	111.392
arrangements for use of pupil referral units and the education of children otherwise than at school, in particular the places to be commissioned by the LA and schools and the arrangements for paying top-up funding	Proposals contained in the High Needs Block Working Group recommendations report to the Forum and the Forum budget papers	11.601
arrangements for early years provision	Proposals contained in the Early Years Block Working Group report to the Forum and the Forum budget papers	81.655

administration arrangements for the allocation of central government grants	No Proposals at this time beyond passporting DfE allocations to schools	
Minimum funding guarantee (MFG)	Consultation responses on MFG reported to Forum on 19 October 2021 and recommended that the level of MFG to be used in the Lancashire funding formula for 2021/22 be set at +2.0%. This is incorporated into the Forum budget papers	
General Duties for maintained schools Contribution to responsibilities that local authorities hold for maintained schools	No Proposals at this time	
Central spend on and the criteria for allocating funding from:		
funding for significant pre-16 pupil growth, including new schools set up to meet basic need, whether maintained or academy	Policy previously agreed by the Schools Forum. Proposal to increase the growth fund unit values in line with increased NFF Minimum Pupil Funding levels each year Final budget proposals are contained in the Schools Budget 2022/23 report	2.000
funding for good or outstanding schools with falling rolls where growth in pupil numbers is expected within three years	No Proposals at this time	
Central spend on:		
early years block provision	Final budget proposals are contained in the Schools Budget 2022/23 report	0.500
funding to enable all schools to meet the infant class size requirement	No Proposals at this time	
back-pay for equal pay claims	No Proposals at this time	
remission of boarding fees at maintained schools and academies	No Proposals at this time	
places in independent schools for non-SEN pupils	No Proposals at this time	
admissions	Final budget proposals are contained in the Schools Budget 2022/23 report	1.400
servicing of schools forum	Final budget proposals are contained in the Schools Budget 2022/23 report	0.188
Contribution to responsibilities that local authorities hold for all schools	No Proposals at this time	
contribution to responsibilities that local authorities hold for maintained schools	No Proposals at this time	

Central spend on:		
capital expenditure funded from revenue: projects must have been planned and decided on prior to April 2013 so no new projects can be charged	No Proposals at this time	
contribution to combined budgets: this is where the schools forum agreed prior to April 2013 a contribution from the schools budget to services which would otherwise be funded from other sources	For 2022/23, £0.350m from the historic commitments element has been transferred to the High Needs Block to ensure continuation of valued services to schools, as recommended by Forum on 6 July 2021	
existing termination of employment costs (costs for specific individuals must have been approved prior to April 2013 so no new redundancy costs can be charged)	No Proposals at this time	
prudential borrowing costs – the commitment must have been approved prior to April 2013	No Proposals at this time	
SEN transport where the schools forum agreed prior to April 2013 a contribution from the schools budget (this is now treated as part of the high needs block but still requires schools forum approval as a historic commitment)	No Proposals at this time	
Central spend on:		
high needs block provision	2022/23 funding level presented as part of the Schools Budget setting proposals	36.423
central licences negotiated by the Secretary of State	2022/23 funding level presented as part of the Schools Budget setting proposals	1.016
Funding of brought forward deficits	No Proposals at this time	

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SCHOOLS BLOCK WORKING GROUP

A report was presented setting out the recommendations from the Schools Block Working Group held on 7 December 2021.

Apprenticeship Levy Update

This item was deferred, as complications had very recently arisen about the ESFA teacher programme and the apprenticeship levy team need to look at the structure of the apprenticeship teacher programme before sharing anything with forum/publishing further information to schools.

ii. Schools Block Funding 2022/23

This report provided an updated on the latest Schools Block funding information and pupil numbers. Final 2022/23 proposals are included in the Schools Budget 202/23 report at item 6.

The Working Group.

- a) Noted the report and the updated NOR data;*
- b) Noted that final Schools Block budget calculations would need to await the 2022/23 DSG allocations from the DfE, expected around 16 December 2021;*
- c) Requested that the School Place Provision Strategy document be circulated to the working group.*

The Forum:

- a) Noted that final budget proposals were contained in the Schools Budget report at item 6.**
- b) Noted that the School Place Provision Strategy document has been circulated to members.**

iii. Reforming how local authorities' school improvement functions are funded ***Government consultation***

A Forum response to the DfE consultation on 'Reforming how local authorities' school improvement functions are funded' was agreed using the Urgent Business Procedure. This report provided information on the urgent business responses and included a copy of the final Forum submission.

The consultation sought views on DfE proposals to

- Remove the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant (the 'Grant'), which is currently allocated to local authorities to support school improvement activities; and
- Make provisions within the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations for the financial year (FY) 2022-23 to allow local authorities to fund all of their school improvement activity (including all core school improvement activities) via de-delegation from schools' budget shares.

As the closing date for this consultation was 26 November 2021, which was before the next meeting of the Forum/working groups, a draft Forum consultation response was circulated for approval using the Urgent Business Procedure.

By the closing date, responses had been received from 18 members, as follows:

- 17 responses supported the draft Forum reply without amendment
- 1 response supported the draft Forum reply but suggested amendments

A copy of the final forum response submitted to the DfE was provided for members. The Forum response raised a number of concerns about :

- The negative impact the proposals may have on school improvement activity for maintained schools;
- The risk that schools will not choose to de-delegate;
- The loss of the grant funding to the school improvement system.
- The unrealistic timescale for implementation.

The consultation documentation indicated that that the DfE decision will be available in 'December 2021/January 2022'. As highlighted in the Forum response, such a timescale would leave very little time for any consultation with maintained schools about a possible 'school improvement' de-delegation from 2022/23, but this possibility exists.

The Lancashire grant allocation for 2021/22 equates to just under £2m and DfE proposals indicate that this would be reduced by 50% in 2022/23, potentially leaving a £1m shortfall in school improvement funding from April 2022.

The Grant is proposed to cease totally from 2023/24.

The working group expressed support for the work undertaken by the School Improvement Service in Lancashire and were extremely concerned about the possible timescales set out in the consultation, which may mean decisions impacting on 2022/23 financial year Schools Budget are only announced by the DfE in 'December 2021/January 2022'; This is putting the school improvement functions offered by Lancashire in jeopardy and creating uncertainty for the service and even for colleagues employment going forward;

Members recognised that it was extremely difficult for the authority to make definitive plans for School Improvement functions from April 2022, without knowing the outcome of the government consultation, but asked if the Service could be considering relevant options. The Group also expressed a view hoping that whatever decision are taken by DfE that implementation is delayed giving all involved reasonable notice of the changes.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the report;*
- b) Noted the Schools Forum consultation response agreed under the Urgent Business Procedure;*
- c) Expressed further concerns about the DfE proposals on Reforming how local authorities' school improvement functions are funded and expressed a view hoping that whatever decision are taken by DfE that implementation is delayed giving all involved reasonable notice of the changes.*

Subsequent to the meeting, on 11 January 2022, DfE issued response to consultation, which was shared with the Forum. DfE indicated that they are proceeding with their proposals despite a majority of responses opposing the proposals.

It was noted that DfE consultation conclusions contained information about in response to some of the concerns raised by the Forum, including:

- "There are concerns that these proposals will place a burden on maintained schools, and as a result schools forums may not de-delegate councils sufficient funds to deliver their core school improvement activities. We will reserve the right to permit de-delegation against the wishes of a schools forum in order to ensure councils are in sufficient funds to deliver their core school improvement activities, if satisfied that the local authority had demonstrated such de-delegation was necessary to ensure they were adequately funded to exercise their core school improvement activities as set out in the Schools Causing Concern guidance.*

- *There are concerns that there may be insufficient time for councils to arrange de-delegation in advance of financial year 2022-23. We have clarified that while councils need to submit their APT by 21 January, they only need to confirm schools' budget shares before de-delegation by 28 February and confirm budget shares after de-delegation by 31 March. ESFA are therefore happy to talk to councils on a case-by-case basis if flexibility is required on timings for confirming de-delegation amounts and rates following the APT submission"*

County Council officers were considering the implications of the DfE announcements and would provide further details to the Forum in due course, including the possibility of a developing a school improvement functions de-delegation proposal for 2022/23.

The Forum:

- a) Noted the report and the consultation response approved using the urgent business procedure;**
- b) Noted the update about the DfE decisions arising from the consultation;**
- c) Note that the LA was considering options, in light of the DfE announcements.**

iv.School Teaching and Support Staff Supply Reimbursement Scheme

Each year, reports are presented to the Forum about the arrangements for the School Teaching and Support Staff Supply Reimbursement Scheme. This report set out proposals for the 2022/23 Scheme changes for consideration.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the report;*
- b) Noted the uncertainties around the current scheme monitoring position for 2021/22;*
- c) Supported the proposed 3% increase on premiums and reimbursements.*

The Forum considered further comments from the Forum Chairs' Group in light of the additional absences related to the Omicron variant. After discussions it was agreed to proceed with the original proposals for a 3% increase in premiums, as there was insufficient claims data on which to base any further increase. It was noted that the scheme held a reserve for this purpose and scheme premiums could be increased in future if an increased ;levels of claims depleted the scheme reserve.

The Forum:

- a) Noted the report, the further information on Lancashire staff absences and the comments made by the Chairs' Group;**
- b) Ratified the Working Group's recommendations and supported the proposed 3% increase on premiums and reimbursements.**

v.Healthy Relationships Training Programme Outcomes

In 2014/15, the Forum allocated a non- recurrent resource of £600K to commission a number of projects to enable staff in schools to develop the confidence, skills and resources needed to deliver effective Healthy Relationships Education and therefore support young people to form healthy relationships now and in the future. Forum agreed to funding being utilised across multiple years and a final outcomes report was now presented.

Overall, 72% of the schools engaged with this training programme 2014 – 2019 and the evaluations of all the courses show the success in meeting people's training needs and in their grading of the quality of training provided by partners and the Teacher Advisers.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report;*
- b) *Expressed thanks to Kate Piercy and her colleagues for the report and the training provided since 2014;*
- c) *Asked that enquiries be made about any school staff helpline considerations that had taken place in Lancashire.*

Following enquiries, it was noted that no Lancashire 24 hour helpline was available, but some services can be bought through LCC occupational health or from other providers.

The Forum ratified the working Group's recommendations.

vi. School Feedback on Covid Catch Up

The Government has made a number of additional funding streams available to schools to assist with the educational recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The County Council's Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee has asked for information about the impact of the DfE catch up funding. Forum members were specifically asked about funding related feedback on the catch up grants and views expressed included:

Some representatives expressed a view supporting the National Tutoring Programme, although it was noted that accessing the systems was not easy at first.

Many members also welcomed the Recovery Premium, as the similarities to the ongoing Pupil Premium Grant meant that schools were already organised for expenditure of this type and the reporting requirements.

The complexity of the school-led tutoring grant was emphasised with members indicating that the administration of the grant was onerous. Concern was also expressed that the grant conditions were burdensome and the DfE have indicated that they will claw back unspent grant or grant funding not used in accordance with the conditions. The group were also worried that many schools maybe unaware of the conditions and therefore at increased risk of the clawback, although it was noted that the LA had published information on the portal about the grant conditions and the full list of school allocations

Comment was also made that the DfE level of contribution dropped in future years making the costs associated with the administration even less appealing to schools.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report;*
- b) *Asked that the views expressed about Covid Catch-Up Funding be considered fed into the wider Scrutiny report.*

The Forum ratified the working Group's recommendations.

vii. Coronavirus (COVID-19) workforce fund to support schools with costs of staff absences

DfE have announced that the government have reopened the Coronavirus (COVID-19) workforce fund to support schools with costs of staff absences. The new window of support will only cover 22 November to 31 December 2021 and strict eligibility criteria are included in the fund conditions.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report.*

It was noted that subsequent to the meeting, DfE have extended the eligibility period for this grant to 18 February 2022.

The Forum noted the report.

i. School Financial Management Information Software

A small number of schools are considering changing their School Financial Management Information Software and the Scheme for Financing School specifies that whatever system a school chooses, they must be able to provide the County Council with their accounts in the required format or meet the costs of modification. Forum views were sought, and the members commented that the increased recent interest in alternative providers may have been caused by concerns over recent communications from SIMS, where the new owner is automatically extending the contract from one year to three years from February 2022.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report;*
- b) *Reiterated their original view around costs and notice periods where schools choose to change their School Financial Management Information Software;*
- c) *Asked that officers seek advice from Lancashire County Council Education Digital Services about the SIMS contract position.*

Subsequent to the meeting information was circulated to members indicating the Lancashire Education Digital Services (LEDS) were aware of the issue and had posted information to schools on the portal and on their website.

At the Forum meeting a further updated was reported to indicate that additional communications had been issued on the Schools Portal. In summary LEDS confirmed in the update that the Local Authority has decided it will sign the ESS Facilitation Agreement and the new ESS SIMS Support Unit agreement. These agreements will:

- *Assign the current Local Authority SIMS licence to each school individually, allowing schools to contract directly with ESS for their SIMS annual licence.*
- *Ensure that all Lancashire maintained schools will benefit from the discounted Local Authority rates on SIMS Annual Entitlement charges for the 3 years of each school's ESS agreement (if they choose to sign the direct contract with ESS which will be offered to schools).*
- *It will also ensure the Local Authority becomes an authorised SIMS Support Unit and the nominated support unit for each Lancashire school (this will be listed on the school's agreements).*

Both agreements are due to be signed shortly and LEADS then anticipate that ESS will be in direct contact by email to all schools, inviting them to review and sign-up to their new school licence agreement via the new ESS Gateway online portal (this is not live yet). LEADS will also issue a third update to schools once these steps are confirmed.

LEADS also have an Education Digital Services Schools Focus Group scheduled for Wednesday 9th February 2022, which will offer schools another opportunity for an update and to ask questions. Forum members are represented on this group.

The Forum:

- a) **Noted the report and the supplementary information provided;**
- b) **Ratified the working group's recommendations.**

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE HIGH NEEDS BLOCK WORKING GROUP

A report was presented setting out the recommendations from the High Needs Block Working Group held on 2 December 2021.

ii. Appointment of HNB Chair and Possible Vice-Chair

Members consider the appointment of a new Chair and Vice-Chair for the Working Group.

The Working Group:

- a) *Elected Claire Thompson as the new working group Chair;*
- b) *Agreed to appoint a working group Vice-Chair*
- c) *Elected Liz Laverty as the new working group Vice-Chair.*

The Forum noted the report.

iii. Alternative Provision Strategy Group Update

Sally Richardson, Head of Inclusion Service attended the working group and provided an update on the Alternative Provision Strategy Group and wider SEND matters.

In Lancashire, there is a broad range of alternative provision on offer, provided by the local authority, independent schools, further education colleges, charities, and businesses. AP may be therapeutic in nature for example for children and young people with social, emotional, and mental health needs or it may offer vocational learning.

The Alternative Provision Strategy 2020 – 2024 was approved by the LCC cabinet in October 2020 and the Alternative Provision working group was then established. The group included PRU representatives, colleagues from other school sectors, and also partners from health and police and FE. An AP action plan was created to support implementation.

It was noted that consideration to alternative provision was also given in review of SEND sufficiency in June 2021.

Key principles of the Alternative Provision Strategy included:

- Increase the number of children and young people supported in mainstream provision
- Reduce the number of exclusions from schools
- Address the rising number of young people receiving home tuition
- Stop off-rolling, leaving young people without education

- Halt the increasing use of specialist provision
- Ensure specialist provision is in the right locations
- Increase the number of young people in education, employment and training

The Working Group:

- Noted the report;*
- Thanked Sally for her presentation.*

The Forum noted the report.

iv. High Needs Block Funding 2022/23

This report provided an updated on the latest High Needs Block funding information and pupil numbers. Final 2022/23 proposals are included in the Schools Budget 2022/23 report at item 6.

The Working Group:

- Noted the report.*

The Forum:

- Noted the report;**
- Noted that the final budget proposals were contained in the 2022/23 Schools Budget report.**

v. High Needs Block Commissioned Places 2022/23

This report provided an update about the proposed HNB places to be commissioned for 2022/23, including those place numbers submitted on the DfE on the annual place change notification submission. All the changes to commissioned places relate to the 2022/23 academic year. A copy of the latest commissioned places for 2022/23 are provided with the report.

The Working Group:

- Noted the report;*
- Supported the Commissioned Place numbers for 2022/23 but asked the LA to be mindful of the comments made.*

The Forum:

- Noted the report;**
- Noted that the commissioned place numbers are incorporated into the budget proposals contained in the 2022/23 Schools Budget report.**

vi. School Teaching and Support Staff Supply Reimbursement Scheme

Each year, reports are presented to the Forum about the arrangements for the School Teaching and Support Staff Supply Reimbursement Scheme. This report set out proposals for the 2022/23 Scheme changes for consideration.

The Working Group:

- Noted the report;*
- Noted the uncertainties around the current scheme monitoring position for 2021/22;*
- Supported the proposed 3% increase on premiums and reimbursements.*

The Forum:

- a) **Noted the report;**
- b) **Noted that final decisions had been agreed under the Schools Block report.**

vii.School Feedback on Covid Catch Up

The Government has made a number of additional funding streams available to schools to assist with the educational recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The County Council's Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee has asked for information about the impact of the DfE catch up funding. Forum members were specifically asked about funding related feedback on the catch up grants. Members views included:

Welcoming the additional funding from government to assist in the educational recovery but expressed a view that there was too much 'jumping through hoops' to access the funding.

The school led tutoring grant was felt to be very bureaucratic and members indicated that many schools had no capacity to undertake the administration associated with grants, or release staff to support to undertake the pre-requisite training. It was also noted that the DfE contribution was to reduce over time. Some schools may therefore not apply for the funding in future years as the burden of apply outweighed the benefits as the funding reduced.

Concern was also expressed about the lack of clarity around some of the outcomes data that would be required. Members felt that the required data should be much clearer in advance.

There was also a view that some of the recovery funding was replacing other funding streams that had been discontinued, for example Y7 literacy and numeracy catch up funding.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report;*
- b) *Asked that the views expressed about Covid Catch-Up Funding be considered fed into the wider Scrutiny report.*

The Forum ratified the working Group's recommendations.

viii.School Census data – special school termly redeterminations

School census data seems to be taking longer to be available to the school funding team than was previously the case and this can impact on special school termly redeterminations and views were sought on whether the reintroduction of the eform may be necessary to ensure that special school spring term 2022 redeterminations can be processed in a timely manner, especially given the proximity of financial year end.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report;*
- b) *Supported the reintroduction of the special school termly redeterminations eform in spring 2022, if necessary, to facilitate timely redeterminations.*

Subsequent to the working group, officers confirmed that the data collection was necessary and have updated the Eform and communication will be issued. Special school Headteacher colleagues agreed to circulate a communication via LaSSHTA.

The Forum ratified the working Group's recommendations.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EARLY YEARS BLOCK WORKING GROUP

A report was presented setting out the recommendations from the Early Years Block Working Group held on 30 November 2021.

i. Early Years Block Funding 2022/23

This report provided an updated on the latest High Needs Block funding information and pupil numbers. Final 2022/23 proposals are included in the Schools Budget 2022/23 report at item 6.

The Working Group

- a) Noted the report;*
- b) Supported the proposed EYB funding allocations for 2022/23;*
- c) Recommended that the proposals be shared with the sector so that providers had early notification of the likely rates, for their planning purposes*

Subsequent to the meeting, officers have had further contact with the DfE, which has included clarification of the current national early years budget forecasts for future years. DfE indicated that the current forecast for 2023/24 and 2024/25 do not include any proposals to uplift the DSG funding rates for LAs from those agreed for 2022/23. The increased funding of £180m in 2023/24 and £160m in 2024/25 included in 2022/23 announcements were expressed as uplifts from 2021/22, so simply maintain the 2022/23 funding rates, with a smaller figure required in 2024/25 due to falling numbers. Officers fed back to DfE that these announcements could be misleading.

There is still considerable time before early years DSG funding rates for 2023/24 and 2024/25 are confirmed, so final allocations can still change and may be influenced by ongoing cost pressures in the sector and beyond, but expectations of increases in early years DSG elements in 2023/24 and 2024/25, as received in 2022/23 and based on the 2022/23 announcements, must be treated with considerable caution.

The Forum:

- a) Noted the report;**
- b) Noted that the final budget proposals were contained in the 2022/23 Schools Budget report;**
- c) Noted the further information about Early Years funding in future years.**

ii. Chancellor's Children's and Family Services Announcements

On 27 October 2021, the Chancellor delivered his Autumn Budget and 2021 Spending Review. The main implications for the working group relating to the Government's increases to the early years block allocations are reported elsewhere on the agenda. However, there were a number of other announcements made by the Chancellor that were about Children's and Family Services that related to the sector,

Members highlighted that Lancashire was unlikely to receive any additional funding from the training of early years staff to support children's lost learning allocation, as we had already been involved in the programme.

The Working Group

- a) *Noted the report;*

The Forum noted the report.

iii. SEN Inclusion Fund

A number of working group members are involved in the Early Years SEN Task and Finish Group that has been meeting to review the SEN Inclusion Fund arrangements. Feedback from members indicated that the new process was viewed positively, as simpler and less bureaucratic.

The last meeting of the SEN Task and Finish took place on 11 October 2021 when it was confirmed that the revised SEN Inclusion Fund arrangements developed by the group had commenced in September 2021, which included:

- Increased the value of allocations;
- Extended the eligibility criteria;
- Reduced bureaucracy in the application process.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report;*
- b) *Provided feedback on the revised SEN Inclusion Fund arrangements for consideration at the SEN Task and Finish Group.*

After the working group, a further meeting took place on 10 January 2022 of SEN inclusion group. Key issues included:

- *Positive feedback provided about revised SEN inclusion fund;*
- *Work to be undertaken about the role of the specialist teacher.*

The Forum:

- a) **Noted the report;**
- b) **Noted that the further updated from the SEN inclusion group.**

iv. Household Support Grant – Christmas Food Vouchers for Early Years Children

Information was provided to the group on Christmas Food Vouchers for Early Years Children.

Settings were notified in the early years bulletin.

It has been agreed that food vouchers for vulnerable families with 2, 3 & 4 year olds will be provided to cover the two week Christmas holiday period, in the same way that they are being provided for eligible school age children. The food vouchers will be issued directly to the eligible children's home addresses by the postal service from 13 December onwards.

The Working Group:

- a) *Noted the report.*

The Forum noted the report.

v. Early Years Benchmarking

The DfE have just published the latest EY benchmarking data, relating to forecast expenditure for 2021/22. It was agreed that the benchmarking spreadsheet would be circulated to members to enable further consideration of the data to take place outside the meeting.

The Lancashire data compared to our statistical neighbours was shared with the Group and members considered the benchmarking information. The data could be used to help inform possible areas for inclusion in the consultation with the sector that was planned ahead of the 2023/24 financial year.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the report;*
- b) Noted that the benchmarking spreadsheet would be circulated to members to enable further consideration.*

Subsequent to the working Group, the benchmarking spreadsheet was circulated to members.

The Forum noted the report.

vi. Operation Encompass

Operation Encompass is a system that provides schools with timely information about all police-attended incidents of domestic abuse.

The system is not fully operational in the EY sector and it was reported that work was being undertaken to resolve the specific issues that had been identified and enable the system to be rolled out across the sector.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the report*

The Forum noted the report.

10. ORACLE FUSION UPDATE

On review of the current project updates and given the priority to consider Schools Budget information this item was deferred.

An Oracle Fusion update will be provided at the Forum meeting in March 2022.

11. APPRENTICESHIP LEVY UPDATE

James Beardwood, Vanessa Carthy and Victoria Lowton from the Skills Learning and Development team attended the meeting for this item.

A presentation was provided about the Teacher Apprenticeship Level 6. Key features of the programme included

- The training will be fully funded for all maintained levy paying schools.
- We will offer this to Early Years (3+), Primary, Secondary and welcome applications from SEND schools .
- Please note there is no specific SEND route offered by the DfE

- Apprentices must be released for a six-week contrasting school placement, typically in Spring
- Apprenticeship Teacher training can only be provided by an accredited ITT provider.

It was noted that the County Council was looking into sourcing a new delivery partner for 2022 and final details of the provision would be finalised once the partner was appointed.

Members sought clarification on a number of key points and members note that they could contact the team with individual queries or to pursue any apprenticeship options.

The Forum:

- a) Noted the report;**
- b) Thanked Apprenticeship Levy colleagues for the presentation.**

12. URGENT BUSINESS

Information about a decision taken using the Forum's urgent business procedure was included in the Schools Block report.

13. FORUM CORRESPONDENCE

A report was presented providing information on Forum related correspondence received since the last meeting.

i. Correspondence from a Lancashire Special School

Correspondence from the Chair of Governors at a Lancashire special school, addressed to Edwina Grant OBE, Executive Director of Education & Children's Services, was received on 3 December 2021, and asked that the letter be forwarded to the Chair of the Schools Forum for consideration. The letter related to the implementation of a 'damage policy' in connection to 'children looked after' that attend the school.

Following discussions with the Chair and officers, it has been judged that decision about the application of the policy is a matter for the county council, as corporate parent and the correspondence has been forwarded on to relevant officers to consider a response.

Members considered the correspondence and were sympathetic to the issues raised and acknowledged that this a matter for the county council, as corporate parent.

The Forum

- a) Noted the correspondence received and the proposed action.**

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

i. Lancashire Education Strategy 2022-2025

Some members had asked about the Lancashire Education Strategy. It was noted that the strategy has been reported to the cabinet, but the county council are working on more accessible version which will include the objectives for the next three years under the 5 priorities so that schools can see very clearly what we will be working towards. Further information to be provided in due course

The Forum noted the information.

ii. Indexation of teachers pensions

A query had been raised in advance of the meeting about the impact of the pay freeze this year on the indexation of teachers pensions. As there is no pay rise, then the pensions will not be index linked to the rate of inflation, however, a pay rise of only £1 would trigger the indexation.

Advice from Lancashire School HR was shared with the Forum. This included information that DfE/LGA may come up with a different solution due to the concerns being raised by the unions, so individual schools may wish to await any further guidance.

It was noted Academies have more flexibility to change their pay policy, but would need to be careful if they have provided any commitment to staff/unions that the school will continue to apply STPCD in its entirety

The Forum noted the information.

iii. E-banking systems

The recent move to schools operating cashless payment systems has, unfortunately, resulted in a significant increase in the number of untraced credits remaining on the LCC schools income account. This account receives hundreds of income lines per day, relating to roughly 500 Lancashire schools.

Currently there are a large number of unallocated / unidentified credits remaining on the LCC income account which is causing us significant concern as we approach the end of the financial year.

It is imperative that all cashless systems are set up correctly, it is crucial to ensure colleagues in the income team can identify each and every transaction and ensure it is coded to the correct school CFR (Consistent Financial Reporting) code.

The County Council will issue guidance on the Schools Portal.

Schools are also asked to consider the choice of any e-banking partner carefully, as there is a risk connected to firms going bust and the loss of the income held by the company at that time.

The Forum noted the information.

iv. Amendment to the Specialist Equipment Policy

A paper was presented to the Chair's working group on 11 January 2022 about a possible amendment to the specialist equipment protocol.

There have been recent developments in assistive listening technology for our deaf pupils. Most audiology depts are now providing Oticon hearing aids (Edumic). The Edumic is much cheaper than the equipment most frequently purchased at the moment (Roger Touchscreen – this will still be provided for some pupils). The Edumic is currently around £250-£300 – approx. 1/4 of the cost of the Roger.

However, the Edumic will fall under the current equipment threshold (£380) for the LA to purchase, meaning it would be for to schools to buy from their own budget.

As the equipment is still specialist and is a significant saving in comparison to that currently purchased for the majority of deaf pupils requiring it, LCC asked the Forum to consider an amendment to the specialist equipment protocol.

The amendment to be considered would be for the Edumic to be exempt from the equipment threshold, so that it could still be purchased and provided by the LA as required. If agreed can be implemented ASAP.

Members considered the report.

The Chairs' Group:

- a) Noted the report;*
- b) Supported the proposal for Edumic to be exempt from the equipment threshold in the specialist equipment procedure, with immediate effect, so that it could still be purchased and provided by the LA as required;*
- c) Recommended that a list of identified equipment that is excluded from the threshold be considered when the equipment policy is reviewed.*

The Forum ratified the Working Group's recommendations.

15. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted the next scheduled Forum meeting will be held at 10.00am Thursday 17 March 2022. Arrangements for the meeting will be confirmed in due course.

A schedule of Forum meetings for the academic year 2022/23 was presented to the Forum.

The Forum approved the 2022/23 academic year schedule of meetings.