

Item 6

Recommendations of the Schools Block Working Group

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Brief Summary

On 7 March 2024, the Schools Block Working Group considered several reports, including:

- **School Forum Membership**
- **Schools Block Budget 2024/25**
- **Inclusion Hub Funding 2024/25**
- **Growth Fund Policy Update 2024/25**

A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided in this report.

Recommendations

The Forum is asked to:

- a) Note the report from the Schools Block Working Group held on 7 March 2024.
- b) Ratify the Working Group's recommendations.

Detail

On 7 March, the Schools Block Working Group considered several reports. A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided below:

6.1 School Forum Membership

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 2023 census numbers are available, the Forum membership has been reviewed against the latest pupil data, academy conversions post census date and conversions anticipated up until 31st March 2024. An analysis is provided below:



<i>Phase</i>	<i>Current Membership</i>	<i>NOR January</i>	<i>% of NOR January 2024</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Membership September 2024 (rounded to nearest even number)</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Maintained Primary schools	22	88,740	52%	20.60	20	0.60
Maintained Secondary schools	10	34,159	20%	7.93	8	-0.07
Academies	8	49,387	29%	11.47	12	-0.53
Total	40	172,286	100%	40	40	0

Members will recall that the Forum membership for maintained primary schools, maintained secondary schools and academies is rounded to the nearest even number, so that an equal number of Headteacher/Principal and Governorship representatives can be appointed.

Due to the number of academy conversions in 2023/24, the data shows that a reduction in the number of maintained representatives and an increase of academy representatives is required from September 2024. It is envisioned this will be achieved naturally during the annual review process. If the reduction does not occur through the annual review, then schools members wish to continue, appointment date and term of office will be taken into account, and if necessary lots will be drawn to identify which members are no longer able to serve on the Forum.

The county council is aware that there are a number of academy conversions planned during 2024 and will keep the membership balance under review ahead of the annual membership refresh for September 2025.

Annual Forum Membership Review

The annual membership review was distributed to members on 27th February 2024, this gives members the opportunity to continue or leave their Forum post from September 2024.

As part of the membership review, members requested the geographic membership distribution across the authority to be reviewed. This showed on the basis of the October 2023 census data in comparison to the current membership, that each district within the county is represented by a maintained voting member on the Forum. It also highlighted that some districts, were marginally over or under representative. This will be reviewed in line with vacancies going forward.

In additional, please note voting members who failed to attend three consecutive meetings, without good reason or apologies, the Forum have the power to disqualify



that member from continuing to hold office on the Forum. This will be reviewed following the March 2024 cycle of meetings, in line with the Operational Arrangements.

The outcome of the review will be communicated to the Schools Forum in the Summer Term.

Schools Forum Chairs Group Membership

It is proposed that each working group, Forum Vice and Forum chair is re-elected in the Summer Term meetings for the next academic year. Current Forum chairs are able to be reappointed during this process. Members can also self nominate for the role, please contact the Forum Clark for more information. If more than one member comes forward, the working group will take a vote.

To note, the Chairs Working Group is made up of the Forum Chairs and representatives from each sector.

The Working Group.

- a) Noted the information.
- b) Welcomed an approach to target vacancies at districts with less representatives in the first instance.
- c) Welcomed the approach to re-elect the Schools Forum chairs annually.
- d)

6.2 Schools Block Budget 2024/25

At the Schools Forum on 11 January 2024, decisions and recommendations about the 2024/25 Schools Budget were agreed.

In connection with the Schools Block, the Forum unanimously supported the 2024/25 Schools Block proposals, including:

- The DfE's National Funding Formula (NFF) methodology should continue to be used as the Lancashire formula for 2024/25;
- The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) be set at +0.5% for 2024/25, mirroring the National Funding Formula;
- Growth Fund allocation not being utilised with National Funding Formula Budgets.
- The use of the Minimum Pupil Funding (MPF) rates contained in the NFF for any new Growth Fund allocations from April 2024:
 - Primary £4,610 per pupil
 - Secondary £5,995 per pupil

On 18 January 2024, the County Council's Cabinet formally approved the Schools Budget for 2024/25.

The Authority Proforma Tool (APT), setting out the agreed Schools Block proposals for 2024/25, was then submitted to the ESFA for compliance checking ahead of the 22 January 2024 deadline.



Some elements of the Schools Budget require compliance checking by the ESFA and approval was received on 20 February 2024.

Budget statements for 2024/25 were prepared and issued on 28 February 2024.

Since 2022/23, the DfE calculate the PPG allocations based on October school census data, rather than the January school census. This means that actual PPG information will be available much sooner, and the DfE have indicated that 2024/25 allocations should be notified to the LA in the summer term.

Once we receive the confirmed 2024/25 PPG allocations from DfE, we will inform schools of their actual PPG allocation for 2024/25 later in the financial year.

Academy schools will receive their PPG allocations directly from the ESFA.

The Working Group.

- a) Noted the information

6.3 Inclusion Hub Funding 2024/25

Following a consultation with schools in the autumn term 2023, the Forum again voted to de-delegate funding for primary inclusion hubs in 2024/25. The de-delegation cost was held at the 2023/24 rate of £11.00 per pupil for maintained primary schools and generates circa £1m for inclusion hub activities in Lancashire.

The distribution methodology has used pupil numbers and a deprivation factor to calculate the allocations for each district. For 2024/25, it is proposed to continue this methodology, the working group was provided with the allocations calculated for each district from April 2024.

District allocations are very similar to those for 2024/25, with 1 district receiving a marginally higher allocation and 8 slightly lower allocations. The largest change for a single district is a circa £3.1k increase in funding and the smallest change is circa £1,000.

Further updates will be presented to the Forum in due course about the operation of the hubs, and the Forum will need to make formal decisions in October 2024 about de-delegation options for 2025/26.

The Working Group.

- a) Noted the report.
- b) Requested the de-delegation to be heavily reviewed for 2025/26 and in depth evidence based reports to be provided to the Schools Forum prior to the de-delegation process in the Autumn Term.

6.4 Growth Fund Policy Update 2024/25

The county council has a responsibility under section 14 of the education act 1996 to ensure that there are sufficient primary and secondary school places in the county.



Since 2014, the Schools Forum has had in place a Growth Fund Policy to assist schools/academies commission by the LA for basic need growth. The policy ensures that a transparent and formulaic process is used for allocating additional funds that takes account of expanding schools' needs whilst minimising the effect on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

The policy has been amended from time to time since its introduction, to take account of various developments. The latest substantive amendment of the policy was agreed by the Forum in March 2021, to support the establishment and growth of a new school in Lancashire.

A copy of the latest policy was provided to members which has been updated for April 2024, to take account of the 2024/25 growth fund rates agreed by Forum as part of the budget setting process (based on the relevant Minimum Pupil Funding (MPF) rate contained in the National Funding Formula) and Schools Operational Guide.

For the first time in 2024 to 2025 local authorities will be required to provide growth funding where a school or academy has agreed with the local authority to provide an extra class to meet basic need in the area (either as a bulge class or as an ongoing commitment). In Lancashire, this will be funded through the Growth Fund. The policy has been amended slightly to reflect this.

In addition, payment options have been removed from the policy, payments will be made by the following;

- This will be payable in a primary school / academy include a payment profile of an equal payment in each of the seven years.
- This will be payable in a secondary school / academy include a payment profile of an equal payment in each of the five years.

The Working Group

- a) Noted the updated policy.

