

Schools Forum Task & Finish Group

Notes of key points raised at the meeting held on 6 December 2016

In attendance

Bill Dowell (Chair of Schools Forum) [BD], Nick Bardsley (Deputy Portfolio Folder, Children's Services) [NB], Mark Rogers (Headteacher, Oxon CE Primary) [MR], John Hitchings (Vice Chair of Schools Forum) [JH], Rob Carlyle (Finance Director, Meole Brace School) [RC]

Local authority officers:

Gwyneth Evans [GE], Stephen Waters [SW], Phil Wilson [PW], Ros Bridges [RB], Jo Jones [JJ]

1 **Welcome**

PW welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 **Apologies**

Apologies received from Pete Johnstone and David Minnery.

3 **Appointment of Chair**

BD was appointed chair of the Task & Finish Group.

4 **Terms of reference for decision-making**

PW outlined the importance of the decisions that will have to be made in this group in January before the school budgets have to be submitted to the EFA on 20 January. BD commented that we need to make sure we share information with other school headteachers to keep them informed.

5 **Education Services Grant (ESG) – background**

SW circulated and took the group through background information on the ESG:

- In 2016-17 the £15 per pupil retained duties rate equates to £0.558m funding to the LA and the £77 per pupil general rate equates to £1.946m
- It was noted that the retained duties allocation is for both maintained schools and academies whereas the general rate allocation is for maintained schools only
- The general rate allocation to LAs is being removed from September 2017, with a transition rate of £20 per pupil for the period April to August – academies will, however, continue to receive this general rate ESG
- The retained duties allocation is being transferred into DSG and

will therefore be under Schools Forum remit for decision making.

6 **School Revenue Funding 2017-18- ESG extract**

GE took the group through the relevant pages on ESG in the EFA operational guide 'Schools revenue funding 2017-18':

- GE noted there is now an option to de-delegate funding for school improvement
- The transitional reduction is from April to August, therefore the £50 per pupil annual rate for general ESG becomes £20 per pupil
- Para. 85 was brought to the groups attention – the amount to be retained by the LA will need to be agreed by maintained school members of Schools Forum
- Under para. 90 – the retained duties rate will be transferred to DSG – the group in principle agreed that this amount would be retained centrally within the DSG (formal decisions will be taken at the January meeting).

7 **Issues and Implications**

- The table listing ESG duties in the EFA guide does not include school improvement. There is going to be separate grant for LAs for school improvement in 2017-18. While £50m is being made available nationally, the allocations to each LA are not yet known but it is expected that this will not be sufficient to cover current school improvement functions in Shropshire
- The group agreed that no decisions could be made on this until we know how much this allocation would be
- MR noted that there are different types of school improvement and, for example, having a termly meeting with a SIA may not be needed by most schools and could be something that is paid for on a frequency the school want. However, it was also recognised that there are some schools that need a lot of input from the LA school improvement team
- The new school improvement grant is likely to be used for intervention where needed and then schools pay for the required support, with the LA having a commissioning role
- BD noted that there is a need to breakdown the duties on the list to the ones that schools can't do without and then others that can be paid for on a traded basis – the former, subject to agreement by the group, would be 'top-sliced' from DSG before school budgets are determined (the group would be seeking to minimise the top-slice)
- The rationale behind the services listed needs to be clear to schools
- MR also noted that we need the details behind other centrally retained budgets to see what that is paying for.

8 Focus of officer work for next meeting

- Officers will go back to different service managers (as listed in the operational guide) to get a breakdown of costs for these services and a decision on whether they need to be top-sliced prior to school budgets being calculated, become a traded option for schools, are already covered by existing SLAs or, in extremis, cease to be provided by the LA
- Next meeting the group will need to consider the costs of providing the current ESG services – list to prioritise the highest budget/impact services
- PW has concerns over the item on the list 'Premature retirement and redundancy' – it will be hard to calculate how much to retain, ensuring there is enough funding to meet all calls on it in a given year
- BD asked NB if he would brief David Minnery and Cabinet members on the issues raised today
- PW will send a briefing note to all schools to make sure they are all aware of the issues and that this group will be making decisions.

9 Next meeting

Thursday 5 January 2017, 9:30-11:30 am, Shrewsbury Training & Development Centre