

Bolton Schools Forum News

Spring Term 2019

As you are aware, the Bolton Schools Forum is the body that advises the Local Authority on matters relating to school budgets. This is a nationally established, legal body on which governors sit and are obviously an integral part. As current Chair of the Forum, my report here is a snapshot of recent developments. The composition of the governors on the Forum changes slightly each year. This is to allow people to propose themselves for this important role, as elections occur.

School Funding Arrangements for 2019/2020

As you are well aware, the government is still in the process of nationally changing the funding system, relating to schools. The Authority has received its initial budgets for 2019/2020. Government changes will not be fully implemented till 2020/2021. Therefore, a soft option will still be implemented. This means that schools will receive the funding equivalent as if all schools were on the national funding formula. However, they will still continue to determine local formulae within the permitted parameters. Please watch out for further developments!

High Needs

The High Needs situation still continues to provide the Authority with financial difficulties. This is a National problem, not only a Bolton one. The number of children in the area of specific needs continues to rise and outstrip allocated budgets. A designated team has been working for some years now to try and establish where monies can be raised (and systems changed) to help alleviate this worrying situation. £2 million has been moved from the Dedicated Schools Grant to assist this financial difficulty. The Authority has had to provide Government with very substantial reasons why this extra money has been diverted from the money dedicated initially to all children. Representations have been made, very vociferously by ourselves and others nationally, to Government about this injustice. Apparently, only recently, do these representations appear to have had some success. I look forward to speaking about this possible success in the not too distant future!

Dedicated Schools Grant Budget 2019/2020

It was recommended by the Forum to the Executive Member that the following should be approved- the funding formula values, adoption of the minimum funding level factor, growth fund criteria, transfer of 1% of the schools block to the high needs block, de-delegation levels and central services expenditure. These recommendations were accepted. Other recommendations were regarding cost services, Early Years block, Pupil Premium and Communication to schools.

De-Delegation

Schools Forum is allowed to retain funding centrally for some services on behalf of all maintained primary and secondary schools where they believe this will be of benefit to the

children of Bolton. The process is that funding is delegated to schools and then schools buy back globally into the service. Academies can buy back into these services via a Service Level Agreement. The services involved in this de-delegation include- maternity, schools library service, schools music service, free school meals eligibility, partnerships and CLEAPSS.

School Balances

The Forum has been advised that schools balances had increased by £1.8 million at March 31st in this financial year. This had been across all types of schools and was due to the prudent use of school funding despite ongoing cost pressures. Forum was also informed that balances transferred to Academies had offset some of this increase in year to the value of £0.45 million.

Trade Union SLA

The current facility time budget is overspent, mainly due to non-buyback time of some large academies. The facility time for each union is being reviewed and staffing amended accordingly. An SLA will operate from 1st April and this will be consulted on. This will include special schools, nursery schools and PRU's. Discussions are ongoing, especially the situation which arises when a school does not purchase a SLA.

Growth Fund

Schools receive growth funding for additional pupils in September that would not be included in the funding formula until the following September. The growth fund can only be used to: support growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need; support additional classes needed to meet the infant class size regulation; meet the cost of new schools. In Bolton this funding has historically been top sliced from the primary schools budget as the growth had previously been in the primary sector. The funding now needs to be reviewed for 2 main reasons. One was that the funding was now a separate allocation and was not top sliced from primary budgets. Secondly, the increase in pupils and pressure on places had now moved to secondary sector. New methodology was now being produced for the growth fund in the light of these changes.

Free School Meals Supplementary Grant

Due to the introduction of the Universal Credit, the DFE have recognised that schools with increasing Free School Meal eligibility will not receive this funding immediately. Consequently, a grant has been paid to the relevant schools. The first payment to schools was in February 2019.

Safeguarding

The role of the Safeguarding In Education team involved assisting schools in their safeguarding duties in order to be compliant with current legislation and also to meet Ofsted regulations in relation to training. Training and additional services were offered. This service was to become a SLA which was a switch in provision.



Integrated Working

The Forum/Authority supported posts within the Families First Programme. This also concerned multi-agency working to help children access school, including children missing from education.

BME

Grants had been awarded to the Bolton Council of Mosques to support their work around community cohesions. The funding had been awarded for 2 years and helped deliver youth work activities.

Schools in Difficulty

These schools were part of the historic commitments of the Central Schools Services block. This service enabled additional support be given to schools in deficit and schools in difficulty, without incurring additional charges.

Contact with the Forum

Via the Clerk to the Forum (Mr. I Mulholland. Tel.- 01204 331037).

Via the Governor Exchange (with its dedicated section on the Bolton Schools Forum).

Via the Governance Support Office.