

# Bolton Schools Forum News

## Autumn Term 2019

### Annual Meeting of the Forum

The Schools Forum held its Annual Meeting on 20 September 2019. This is a business meeting with an ordinary one following. Several reports from this meeting follow. Previous to the meeting, there was a Training Session for new people to the Forum, which was found to be most helpful. However, as I have been writing this report for some years and there are new members to Governing Boards all the time, I am reminded that a quick overview of how the Forum started and works could be useful to all concerned and/or interested.

### The Beginnings and What the Forum does

The Forum was legally established by Government in 2002 to advise Local authorities on matters relating to school budgets. It also has certain decision-making powers. The budget is distributed to individual schools via a formula which has been agreed and is based on their individual needs. If certain changes to the formula are requested, these must be approved by the Forum (e.g. alterations to the minimum-funding guarantee which is allowed to schools). Furthermore, the Forum has to agree before any centrally-held education budgets can be combined with other budgets, for their mutual benefits, if proposed. In exceptional circumstances the Forum can also increase the Centrally-retained Budget above its limit. It also agrees the level of school specific contingency at the start of each year.

### Representation on the Forum

Governors and Head Teachers constitute equally the bulk of the total Forum membership. That is 23 members from a total of 31. This the "school members" category. The remaining category of 8 members is termed the "non-school members". This consists of representatives of the Trade Unions, the C/E and R/C dioceses, a Council representative, the Early Years, PVI's the 16/19 Sector and the Pupil Referral Units.

### Governors on the Forum for 2019/2020

The Primary School Governors are myself (Mike Doyle), Anthony Slack, David Bevitt, Pauline Lewis and Daniel Gauld. The Secondary School Governors are Patricia Jones and Joanne Murphy. Sarah Greenhalgh represents Special Schools Governors.

### Chair/Vice Chair of the Forum

Mike Doyle - Chair (also Vice Chair of Governors at Pikes Lane Primary School) and Phil Hart - Vice Chair (also Head Teacher at Westhoughton High School) were both re-elected to these positions for the next 4 years.

### Schools Funding for 2020-2021

Over recent weeks the Government has announced the spending review headlines for 2021/2021 and the following 2 years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. The National Funding Formula (NFF) will not be fully implemented in 2020-2021. However, the commitment to NFF has been heightened as changes demonstrate further hardening of the formula e.g. Minimum Funding levels and block transfers. There is no confirmed date for full implementation as the process is complex, e.g. transition, some factors are difficult to formalise. This means that in 2020-2021 a soft formula will still be in operation, i.e. Bolton will receive the funding equivalent to all schools as if they were under the NFF but will continue to determine local formulae within the permitted parameters. All Bolton schools are in full consultation regarding all issues highlighted here.

## Other School Funding Arrangements

The High Needs Block nationally was set to increase financially in 2020-2021 and in terms of the Early Years Block, the £66m national increase was across all funding rates for two, three and four year olds. The teachers pay grant and teachers pensions grant would continue, as usual, in 2020-2021 but the aim was to transfer them into the DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant) from 2021-2022.

## Audit Update GDPR Service for Schools

Ms. Judith Smith, Principal Auditor, gave a presentation on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Service for local schools. She explained that the service included a telephone help line, annual audit visit to schools, e-learning package for staff and a suitable suite of templates for school use. Data protection Impact Assessments, data breaches, subject access requests and freedom of information requests were also spoken about. 103 schools initially signed to the SLA.

## SEN Call for Evidence

The DFE had recently launched a call for evidence for SEN from local authorities. This concerned understanding how current funding was distributed and enabling mainstream settings make provision for pupils with additional needs. A questionnaire was returned to the DFE highlighting the following- funding through the local schools formula, the notional SEN budget and funding for pupils who need alternative provision or were at risk of exclusion from school, could under-investment at one stage lead to more cost and worse outcomes later, and matters around the current financial arrangements.

## Primary Social Emotional Mental Health Provision

The Forum has been updated about the current situation regarding SEMHP within the Borough. These following items were discussed- the proposed strategy going forward, the work to be done by the Multi agency strategy team, proactive and preventative provision at Key Stage 1, long stay/ key stage 2 SEMH resourced provision and long stay Year 5 and Year 6 provision. There has been wide discussions and support for the provisions above throughout the Authority. The programme has also been agreed at Committee Level.

## Bolton Library and Music Service

Members of the above service have spoken to the Forum recently. Information provided included- what their Service Level Agreement offered, feedback from children who had visited the Library and Music service, value for money and other opportunities to work together. Forum members asked about the following- the percentage of schools engaging with service, how far their workshops extended, were teachers meetings accommodated and could a list of services go on the Extranet.

## ***Mike Doyle, Chair of the Bolton Schools Forum***

## **Contact with the Forum**

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

Via the Governance Services Website (with its dedicated section on the Bolton Schools Forum).

Via the Governance Services Team.