

Lancashire Schools Forum – Autumn Term 2018 Report



Since my last report to you on the 26th September there have been six meetings of the Lancashire Schools Forum. ***Much of the business of this term was taken up with the High Needs deficit.***

An induction meeting for new members was held on the 24th September. The **High Needs Bloc** then met on the 25th September. Steve Belbin gave a presentation about the proposals to reduce the number of exclusions through intervention work. At this stage a consultation was ongoing re the need to transfer some money from the Schools Bloc to the High Needs in order to try to cover the expected shortfall. Four proposals were made: ranging from no transfer, £0.15M, £1.35M or £4M, which was the maximum that could be transferred without Secretary of State permission. The situation was similar to last year and a £7.8M overspend was forecast for March 2019. We discussed several funding bids including the MASH, well-being service and support for the Police and Crime Commissioner, but no decisions could be taken on these. Various savings were planned.

The **Schools Bloc** then met on the 4th October. Again the HNB shortfall dominated the discussions. After much discussion a vote was taken, and the overwhelming majority of people supported the £4M transfer. Steve Belbin gave another presentation about the intervention proposals. It was also reported that six schools are in the highest category of financial difficulty, and nine are in category two. We also considered an appeal against Clawback.

On the 17th October the **Full Forum** met. Again there was a presentation by Steve Belbin. A report was given about the responses to the consultation on the funding transfer. 23% supported the £0.15M, 28% supported the £1.35M, 20% supported the £4M, and 11% supported the no transfer option. Nevertheless, because of the all the emerging information about the funding deficit the Forum decided to support the £4M transfer and a letter explaining this decision was sent to schools and put on the Schools Portal.

The **High Needs Bloc** met on the 27th November. This was one of the most dramatic and challenging meetings which I think the Schools Forum has ever had. People being affected by the cuts and uncertainties were present. One of the big problems here concerned the Weighted Pupil Number (WPN) which is having to be rebased. SEND and Finance had been tasked with this at the beginning of the year, but no progress had been made and the detailed information requested by Finance was not forthcoming. As the budgets have to be prepared in December, an average position was taken and the rate is going to be cut. Understandably the SEND people were questioned hard about their lack of co-operation and it emerged that only two meetings had been held over the whole year and no progress made on this. Other items in this meeting received similar robust challenges, and there was a fair degree of criticism of the vagueness of the intervention proposals.

On the 29th November the Apprenticeship Levy group met, and then this was followed by a meeting of the **Early Years** bloc. This meeting emphasised the difficulties facing the Private Sector nurseries, and a table was provided showing how the more dependent upon the grant the nurseries are, the less financially viable they become because the grants are underfunded by £1.90 per hour. This will affect the most deprived areas first.

Lastly, the **Schools Bloc** met again on the 13th December. This long meeting rounded off much of the preceding regarding the problem of the High Needs deficit. Discussion of the controversial intervention proposals became so heated that people had to be given a lecture by the chairman. Steve Belbin was questioned quite hard on how he defined the 'Hub' in his proposal. Many people expressed fears about the uncertainties being generated by the need for cuts and the necessity of reducing staffing.