

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting held on 3 July 2018

Present: Steve Barr (Chairman)

Attendance

Richard Osborne	Sara Bailey
Wendy Whelan	Chris Wright
Philip Siddell	Kevin Allbutt
Richard Redgate	Steve Swatton
Alison Gibson	Claire Evans
Stuart Jones	Richard Lane
Philip Tapp (Vice-Chairman)	Anita Rattan
Kirsty Rogers	

Observers: Mark Sutton and Philip White.

Also in attendance: Alison Barnes, Richard Hancock, Graham Pirt, Andrew Marsden, Tim Moss, Sara Pitt, Michelle Williams and Tina Gould.

Apologies: Wendy Keeble, Karen Dobson, Jonathan Jones and Nicky Crookshank

PART ONE

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2018

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Schools Forum held on 26 March 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters Arising and Decisions taken by the Chairman

A message in the Schools e-bag had included details of the WorthLess? schools campaign for fairer funding. It was hoped that a delegation of Head Teachers from Staffordshire would go to Downing Street in September.

The Staffordshire Education and Skills Strategy Group had met twice. Papers were available on the Staffordshire Learning Net. Discussions are at any early stage and Schools Forum will be briefed and consulted.

A meeting has taken place between local authority officers to discuss the Constitution. Work is ongoing.

The Chairman asked if the contact details for Members of the Forum could be displayed on the website. Tina Gould agreed that she would ask Julie Roberts to take this matter up with the Council's Web Team.

A NJC Pay Award Settlement has been agreed from 2019. This matter will be discussed by the Schools Forum on a date to be agreed. The next Joint Consultative Committee will be held on 10 July.

The PVI (Early Years) representative stated that he had received answers to the questions he posed at the last meeting regarding funding for early years and thanked officers for their responses. Concern was expressed that Early Years Providers are not receiving the £5.00 rate (for 2 year olds) and this is leaving them £1.07 adrift per child, at a time when wage costs have risen. This will have an impact on the viability of small day nursery providers.

The County Commissioner for Access to Learning said that the Childcare and Sufficiency Manager was aware of the impact of deprivation on school settings and that the County Council intended to review the rates for all early education entitlements.

Note by Clerk: Review of Early Years Rate 2019/20 is on the Work Programme – date to be confirmed.

Wendy Keeble invited members to get in touch with her with any comments regarding My Finance. The future of the working group is under discussion. Steve Swatton raised an issue regarding invoicing to schools and was asked to outline his concerns directly to Wendy Keeble cc Michelle Williams.

4. Schools Budget 2017-18: Final Outturn

The Senior Finance Business Partner summarised 2017-18 final outturn. The report detailed a 0.2 per cent overspend in the context of a larger overall overspend and risks of diminishing balances. Appendix 1 to the report provided more detail. In summary there was a variance of £2.193m broken down into four blocks: individual schools; high needs, excluding place funding; early years and central and de-delegated items. The DSG settlement for 2017-18 was £1.1m leaving a variance of 0.19% on the budgeted funding. The High Needs block was overspent by £4.0m, but in real terms this was £5.2m due to the use of reserves. Based on current trend this was more likely to be £5m-£7m overspent in 2018-19. There was an underspend on Early Years, but no settlement will be announced until early July which may affect this through a funding adjustment and late claims. All local authorities were showing a similar financial outcome. This information will be fed into the discussions on Early Years mentioned previously. Central and de-delegated items have underspent by 4.37%, mainly as there was less call on this contingency, an underspend on the Growth Fund and also on CERA related costs. The DSG reserve at 31 March was £5.053m. The underspend on the Growth Fund (£0.326m) has to be applied back to the service meaning in real terms the reserves stand at £4.726m. There were ongoing pressures on the High Needs Block indicating that the reserves would potentially be used up by the end of the 2018-19 financial year. There were a number of approved licenced deficits (9 schools, with a value of £1.241m). The funding was met from school balances and may increase if more schools find themselves in deficit. Members were asked to contact the Senior

Business Finance Partner if they wished to see the maintained schools balance list, or if they had any concerns.

RESOLVED: That the Schools Forum note the outturn for 2017-18 and the update on the Schools Budget for 2018-19.

5. Update to the Scheme for Financing Schools

The Head of Education Finance, Entrust, updated Members on the proposed revisions to the Staffordshire Scheme for Financing Schools (SSFS). She drew members' attention to the amendments and reasons for the recommendation. The Chairman asked that the most up-to-date version of the Scheme be made available on the Staffordshire Learning Net.

RESOLVED: The Schools Forum approved the updates to the Scheme.

6. Notices of Concern

The Head of Education Finance, Entrust, drew members' attention to the two new Notices of Concern that had been issued since the last meeting for All Saints, Bednall and Two Gates who had been issued with a Directive Academy Order. A notice of concern had been withdrawn for Blythe Bridge School.

RESOLVED: That the Notices of Concern be noted.

7. Growth Fund - Allocation of Funding 2018/19

The County Commissioner for Access to Learning introduced the report to advise members of how Growth Fund had been allocated for 2018/19, in accordance with Forum's approved criteria.

Paragraph 5 of the report gave details of funding for infant class size legislation: £65,799 from the £95,000 budget would be allocated to five schools to fund an agreed number of additional infant class teachers (with schools' self-declarations shown in Appendix A).

From the Basic Need Growth Budget of £500,000, £69,900 would be allocated to two schools for exceptional growth (with self-declarations shown in Appendix B) with a further £131,000 of start-up funding allocated to two new primary free schools in Cannock and Streethay (with details in Appendix C).

Across the two budgets, the net result was an underspend of £328,301, that the allocation of £200,900 for exceptional pupil growth was within the budget of £500,000 which represented an underspend of £299,100. This was broadly in line with this year's underspend. Appendix 3 gave details of the estimated revenue start-up costs for new free schools which will be returned to the 2019/20 ISB. This was broadly in line with this year's underspend but future underspends would be reduced if more new free schools were opened as indicated in Appendix 3.

Members asked what support was being provided to support special schools whose numbers were increasing year on year. The County Commissioner for Access to Learning responded that this did not fall within the remit of the Growth Fund in Schools revenue funding. The Interim Education Lead for Vulnerable Learners confirmed this and advised members of the SEND Transformation Plan, that is aimed at preventing and reducing the need and pressure on special schools, and of the pilots taking place in South Staffordshire and Leek.

RESOLVED: That the Schools Forum receive the report.

8. Schools Information Management System

The County Commissioner for School Quality Assurance and Intervention introduced this item, stating that the existing SIMS contract between the County Council and Capita was coming towards the end of its tenth year of operation. There was an option 1) to extend the contract for five years, and then a further five years; or 2) SCC could negotiate an annual rolling contract/extension to the existing SIMS contract and provide information to the October Schools Forum meeting. Schools Forum voted each year on whether or not to de-delegate DSG to Staffordshire County Council for this contract. The vote was due to take place in October. Option 1) is subject to agreement by Schools Forum that maintained schools will accept payment of any future breakage charges as a result of early termination (i.e. terminating the contract prior to the 31/03/2024). In order to negate breakage charges, 18 months' notice from the annual October Schools Forum will be required. Following a question on whether the cost of the contract licence would vary dependent upon the number of schools involved, the County Commissioner stated that the cost would be reduced dependent on the number of pupils in maintained schools. The Chairman asked if option 1 was agreed, would this decision need to be reviewed at the October 2018 forum meeting. The County Commissioner confirmed that if option 1 was approved then no decision would be required at the October 2018 meeting. Schools that converted to academies must take out their own licence. The main concern was regarding the breakage cost.

RESOLVED: a) That Schools Forum approved Option 1 – that Staffordshire County Council extends the existing SIMS contract for 5 years b) Schools Forum will approve this element of the ongoing de-delegation budget reports or provide 18 months' notice from the annual October Schools Forum of an early termination.

9. Early Help Dedicated Schools Grant Update

The Head of Child Health and Wellbeing reminded members that the arrangements for £1.44m previously top sliced from the Dedicated Schools Grant for Early Help to partly fund LSTs to deliver tier 2 family support for 2018/19, were shortly to come to an end and the Schools Forum were asked to support a further 12 months' funding to enable the arrangements to prove their effectiveness. The County Council had worked with schools on a district footprint to enable schools to make the most appropriate use of resource for each district. In spite of tight timescales, agreements had been reached on how to use the resources and procure new services. By April 2018 new services were in place and 25 per cent of resources had been used. A range of contracts had been put in place. Outcomes were not yet available but some case studies could be shared

with members. Providers had been flexible in stretching numbers in terms of contract provision so that more families could benefit from the services. A task and finish group from across schools was being set up by September to support best practice. Members who are interested in participating should send their contact details to natasha.moody@staffordshire.gov.uk

The Early Years Commissioning Manager summarised the lessons learned. There was a need to be flexible as there is not a single mechanism for making local decisions. There is a real difference between schools, with some schools wanting to be more involved than others. Each district is at a different stage in the journey with Staffordshire Moorlands at a slower pace, but was now gaining ground. There are a range of schools using services and referrals are now coming in from outside the county. All providers are from the voluntary sector and they have worked flexibly, but are now wanting a longer term financial commitment.

Alison Gibson, representing the Secondary Heads Forum, asked how head teachers find out what is happening and how do they get involved. The Head of Child Health and Wellbeing stated that governance had been a challenge. In some areas groups of head teachers had come together to discuss commissioning of support for children and families in their district; in other areas discussions had taken place at the District Improvement Boards. Communication had taken place through the ebag and providers had been tasked with meeting head teachers. Forum members asked if communication could be reviewed as there was a sense that it was piecemeal.

Specifically in Staffordshire Moorlands, Homestart and Vision had helped with communicating with head teachers. An interactive pdf was being developed and this would be launched by the end of July. The District Commissioning Officers and Strategic Delivery Managers were also trying to assist with communication. The Head of Child Health and Wellbeing acknowledged that more needed to be done to improve communication and vowed to get better at this.

Members reflected that creating hubs where primary and secondary schools worked together had been very positive and others were encouraged to do the same.

RESOLVED: a) That the Schools Forum agreed that the Early Help Dedicated Schools Grant funding continues to be allocated for a further 12 months on a district footprint covering all phases. b) The Schools Forum agreed that the funding continue to fund family support using the current contractual arrangements for a further 12 months. c) That officers note the concerns regarding communication with the Secondary Heads' Forum d) a further report on the Early Help Dedicated Schools Grant be brought to the Schools Forum at a date to be agreed and that this be added to the Work Programme.

10. Annual Review of Schools Forum Membership

The Chairman asked Members to note the contents of the report, specifically the changes in paragraph 8 of the report that indicated that the Forum was short of one primary academy representative and one secondary academy representative. He reported that Wendy Horden was retiring. She had represented a maintained primary school that has become an academy. The County Commissioner for School Quality Assurance and Intervention reminded Schools Forum that SCC must ensure that the

Staffordshire Schools Forum is constituted in accordance with The Schools Forum Regulations laid out in law.

There remained one vacancy at a primary maintained school, so elections for this vacancy would be arranged.

RESOLVED: That the Schools Forum note the contents of the report.

11. Work Programme

Members considered the Work Programme and the amendments proposed at the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be agreed with the addition of a further update on the Early Help Dedicated Schools Grant at a date to be agreed.

12. Date of next meeting

The Chairman stated that this would be the last meeting at the Kingston Centre and an alternative venue for meetings would be sought.

13. Exclusion of the public

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraph of Part 1 of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 indicated below'

14. Update on High Needs Block

(Exemption paragraph 4)

Chairman