

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting held on 8 November 2021

Present: Richard Redgate (Chair)

Attendance

Richard Sutton	Julie Rudge
Steve Swatton	Anne Tapp
Philip Siddell	Alison Parr
Claire Shaw	Abigail Rourke
Kirsty Rogers	Andrew Shaw
Chris Wright	Nadine Key
Steve Barr (Vice-Chairman)	Helen Baron
Kevin Allbutt	Jessica Roden
Judy Wyman	Sadie Jones
Claire Evans	Karen Dobson
Mark Sutton (Observer)	Emily Verow
Vicki Lewis	Mr Lycett (Sub for C Trowbridge)

Observers: Alun Harding and Steve Breeze.

Also in attendance: Lesley Calverley, Tim Moss, William Wilkes, Melanie Scott, Joanne Galt, Antony Humpherys, Cathryn Plant and Mandy Pattinson.

Apologies: Kim Prince Anson, Jane Rutherford, Jennie Westley, Jonathan Price, Kelly Mitchell, Mark Boughey and Sarah Clark (Work Commitment).

NOTED: The apologies and reasons for absence were formally accepted.

PART ONE

45. Membership Update

It was reported that Mr Richard Sutton (Primary Academies) and Mr Stephen Swatton (Maintained Primary) had been elected to serve on the Forum until May 2025.

A complete membership list was provided for information.

RESOLVED: That the updated membership be noted.

46. Declarations of Interest

Steve Barr and Judy Wyman declared interest in report 9 'School Budgets 2022-23: de-delegation, Central Expenditure and Education Functions'. The Forum agreed that they would be allowed to remain in the meeting and speak on the item.

47. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2021

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 15 July 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The forum had the following discussion over items in the minutes:

- A request was made that the current consultation on the abolition of the School Improvement Grant be publicised to schools and governors through the school bag.
- In relation to minute 39 - growth fund and schools not being asked to submit financial self declarations post Covid, it was asked if this could be added to the work programme so that it wasn't missed.
- It was requested that future minutes of the Education Banding working group be circulated to the Forum and that it be added to the work programme.
- Under Minute 40, a member had been contacted and relayed a request that Officers contact Sir Graham Balfour school to review their PFI calculation.

48. Decisions taken by the Chairman under delegated powers

The Chair reported that he had drafted a letter to the Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi, concerning school funding. A copy had been circulated to members of the forum for information. He reported that following communication with Philip Siddell, the letter would be amended to include early years funding.

RESOLVED: That the action taken by the Chair be noted.

49. Notices of Concern and Licensed Deficit Agreements

It was reported that there had not been any new notices of concern or licensed deficits issued since the last meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

50. Primary Behaviour Support Services - 2020-21 Financial Year

The Behaviour Support Service for primary schools had been a centrally retained service until 2012/13, when it became a de-delegated service under Exception 1 of the Funding Reform requirements. Maintained primary schools

had voted annually to retain this as a centrally provided service. The service was managed by Entrust Education Services, Staffordshire County Council's joint venture partner.

It was confirmed that the de-delegation figure had stayed the same as in 2020/21.

Maintained primary school representatives were entitled to vote on whether they wished this service to remain a de-delegated service. Having voted on this issue it was:

RESOLVED:

- a) That the de-delegated funding from the maintained primary schools delegated budget for 2022-23 financial year be agreed.
- b) That the continued improvements and development of service and proposals for next year be noted.

51. Minority Ethnic Achievement Service (MEAS) 2020-21 Financial Year

The Minority Ethnic Achievement Service (MEAS) had become a de-delegated service under Exception 1 of the Funding Reform requirements and another service that the Forum had voted annually to retain central provision. The MEAS was available to primary and secondary maintained schools on a pupil by pupil basis or as a combined package of Inclusion Support and other services.

The Forum received details of the Service offer, referral numbers from maintained schools and the Service impact.

It was noted that the report referred to Afghanistan refugees and this should have been 'evacuees'.

A request was made that meetings with schools be held face to face wherever possible and not all virtual.

All phases of maintained mainstream school representatives were entitled to vote on whether the MEAS should remain a de-delegated service. Following the vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Minority Ethnic Achievement Service continue to be de-delegated for 2022-23.
- b) That the continued improvements and development of the service over the previous year and the proposals for next year be noted.

52. Schools Budget 2022-23: De-delegation, Central Expenditure and Education Functions

The Forum received the School Budget 2022-23 de-delegation, central expenditure and education functions report. The report sought approval from the Forum for the Local Authority to retain Dedicated School Grant (DSG) funding to deliver services on behalf of schools and Early Years. Members noted that the budget areas proposed for de-delegation in 2022-23 were the same as those in the previous years. It was also noted that funding for historic commitments had been reduced by a further 20% from 2021-22.

Budget Area	Primary £m	Secondary (including middle) £m
Insurances (mainly premises related provided by RPA)	1.200	0.932
Staff costs (Maternity Pay)	1.189	1.010
Staff costs (Union Duties)	0.142	0.060
School Specific Contingency	0.390	0.185
Support for ethnic minority pupils or under-achieving groups	0.877	0.319
Licences and Subscriptions	0.505	0.205
Behaviour Support Services	0.529	Delegated
FSM eligibility	0.061	0.032

Forum members representing all mainstream maintained schools considered the budget areas listed in the table above and voted to **de-delegate these areas for 2022-23**.

Funding in the Central Schools Service Block (CSSB) was split into historic commitments and ongoing functions. Funding for historic commitments had been reduced by a further 20% from 2021/22. The provisional allocation for historic commitments for 2022-23 was £1.633m.

The only heading under which Staffordshire retained funding for historic commitments was prudential borrowing. The indicative budget for 2022-23 was £924,130. Any remaining historical commitment funding would be delegated to schools.

Forum approval was also sought for SEN transport budget of £250,140 which was to be funded from the High Needs Block.

All Forum Members gave consideration to the areas of retained historic commitment funding and ongoing functions within the CSSB be retained centrally for this purpose. **On being put to the vote, this was approved.**

Ongoing Education Functions were funded by a combination of council tax and DSG. There is an annual liability for Teachers Pensions Added Years of c£7.3m which was funded by council tax. The estimated cost for other ongoing education functions for 2022-23 was £3.9m, funded by DSG through the CSSB. Any underspend on CSSB would be transferred into DSG balances.

It was explained that the above inflationary increase cost for the Strategic Asset Management Team was due to the increased number of academies, correspondingly there is a reduction in costs for maintained schools reflected in Appendix 3.

All Forum Members voted to **approve the ongoing functions allocation in the CSSB.**

As in previous years it was proposed that the growth funding allocation be used to fund pupil growth in the National Funding Formula (approx. £2m in 2021-22), and allocations as per the Growth Fund and Infant Class Size policies (approx. £600k). Any underspend would contribute to DSG balances.

All Forum Members voted to **approve the continuing use of the Growth Funding allocation as set out above.**

The LA was asking for £1.9m (4.2%) of Early Years funding to be retained centrally. This expenditure funded the Entrust SDA contract, along with back office administration and overheads, with Members receiving a breakdown of these costs in the report.

There was concern that although this was similar to previous years, it was in a year of increased wage and National insurance contributions. Support in forming joint working arrangements, as in previous years, was requested as this had helped the early years sector previously. This was agreed.

All Schools Forum Members agreed to **approve the proposed level of central support services for early years provision.**

The LA asked for provisional approval of a levy of £50.56 per pupil from maintained schools to fund Education Functions previously funded by the Education Services Grant.

All mainstream maintained Schools Forum Members **agreed to approve the levies per pupil** (set out in Appendix 3 of the report) to fund the costs of the associated services.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the outcome of the maintained school vote on de-delegation, as listed in the table above be approved;
- b) the indicative allocations for both historic commitments and ongoing functions within the Central School Services Block be approved and retained centrally for this purpose;
- c) the continued use of the formula driven Growth Funding allocation be approved;
- d) the retention of £1.9m of Early Years funding centrally be approved; and,
- e) the levy per pupil in 2022-23 to fund statutory duties performed by the LA and previously funded by the ESG general duties be approved.

53. High Needs Block

It was reported that the forecast outturn for the 2021/22 High Needs Block was £7.5m overspend. At the end of the last financial year the DSG reserve went into deficit by c £2m and it was expected that this would deepen given the expected overspend in 2021/22.

There had been significant additional Government funding allocated for next year, which would see Staffordshire's High Needs Budget increase to £110m (c 9%). However, this was insufficient to close the gap and it was likely that a further overspend would arise in 2022/23.

The transformation and implementation of the revised SEND operating model, supported by the new SEND strategy, was expected to provide a more sustainable model. However, this would take time to impact.

A 'deficit recovery' was previously approved by Schools Forum earmarking surplus Growth Fund money to contribute to the DSG reserve; it was agreed this should be reviewed annually and further action taken if necessary. It was explained that this was the single largest financial risk to the Local Authority.

Consultation had been conducted with schools but only 10.5% replying. Of these 6 were in favour of the transfer and 33 were against the 0.5% transfer.

Given the continuing SEND demand, and growing deficit, schools forum was asked to approve the transfer of 0.5% funding from school's block for high needs in 2022/23.

Whilst the Forum understood the Councils dilemma, it was felt that Members had to vote for the schools they represented and that while funding was needed for the HNB it was felt that this should not be at the expense of the Schools Block of the DSG. Members also shared concerns at the cost of independent school placements.

Upon being put to the vote the **proposal to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block of the DSG to the High Needs Block in 2022/23 was lost.**

The vote was unanimous, with 100% of attendees voting against (23 members with voting rights were at the Forum).

RESOLVED:

- a) the High Needs Block budget 2021/22 and latest forecast outcome be noted;
- b) the latest budget assumptions 2022/23 and going forward be noted;
- c) that the outcomes of the council's consultation with schools regarding the 0.5% funding switch be noted.
- d) That the Chairs letter to the Secretary of State (minute 48 above), be strengthened to emphasise the high needs issue in the County.

54. Education Banding Toolkit update

The Forum were informed that Education Banding Tool Implementation Group had consulted on its recommendations on the Education Banding Tool which was to support 'fair, equitable and consistent' funding mechanisms across the education providers and localities. The consultation had ran from 4 October to 29th October. Only 22 responses had been received. The results of the consultation would be shared with education providers in late November.

It was explained that the modelling had been done on current expenditure levels and that it would inevitably lead to some 'winners and some losers' but a fairer system and this would not have an immediate impact on any education providers due to the agreed phased implementation approach.

RESOLVED: That the progress to date on Education Banding Tool implementation and consultation be noted.

55. Work Programme

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme and future meeting dates be noted.

Chair