

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting held on 13 January 2022

Present: Richard Redgate (Chair)

Attendance

Richard Sutton	Julie Rudge
Steve Swatton	Anne Tapp
Jane Rutherford	Mark Boughey
Philip Siddell	Nadine Key
Kirsty Rogers	Carolyn Trowbridge
Chris Wright	Sarah Clark
Steve Barr (Vice-Chair)	Jessica Roden
Kevin Allbutt	Sadie Jones
Judy Wyman	Karen Dobson
Mark Sutton (Observer)	Emily Verow
Vicki Lewis	

Observers: Alun Harding and Steve Breeze.

Also in attendance: Lesley Calverley, Tim Moss, Andrew Marsden, Antony Humphreys and Mandy Pattinson.

Apologies: Kelly Mitchell (Sent Substitute – Kate Cooke) Jenni Westley (Work Commitment due to Covid), Kim Prince Anson (Work Commitment due to Covid), Claire Evans, Alison Parr (Sent Substitute – Sarah Latham) and Helen Baron (Family Bereavement), Cllr J Price (Work Commitment).

Kelly Mitchell had informed the Chair that she would be taking a 12 month career break and asked if a named substitute (Kate Cooke) could represent her while she was away.

NOTED:

- (a) The apologies and reasons for absence were formally accepted.
- (b) That Kate Cooke be agreed as the name substitute for Kelly Mitchell, representing Maintained Primaries.

56. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

57. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2021

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 8 November 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

1. Minute 45 - Membership – Mr Shaw had resigned, and the recruitment process was being followed.
2. Minute 47 -update - Consultation on the abolition of the Schools Improvement Grant had been published and this would proceed with withdrawing the grant on a phased basis, Year 1. 50% Year 2. 100%. The Governments revised guidance would be published soon and this would explain the LA role. This would be considered along with what this meant for Schools Forum and maintained schools which remained, this would come back to a forum meeting in October if de-delegation was requested.
3. Minute 52 – Early Years Funding and the scheduled meeting with officers and providers later in the month. It was confirmed that the group would receive data on deprivation supplements and any other supplements and underspend to consider at the meeting and the group would discuss the cost increases within the sector.
4. Minute 53 - High Needs Block – Had the Local Authority (LA) appealed and if so, what was the timescales for the decision? In response Tim Moss reported that the LA had appealed but no formal feedback had been received and more detail was in the HNB report later on the agenda.

58. Decisions taken by the Chairman under delegated powers

None taken by the Chair since the last meeting.

59. 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.

60. Growth Fund - Submission of Financial Self Declaration

The report explained that in 2016/17, Schools Forum had introduced a requirement for schools who were eligible for growth funding to submit a financial self-declaration for the three previous financial years. This requirement had been suspended during the Covid pandemic to reduce schools administrative burdens.

It was explained that the information had not been used and proved an administrative burden on schools and was also inconsistent as maintained and academy budgets operated under different financial years and accounting rules.

The report recommended ending the requirement for schools to submit the financial information.

Representatives of the Schools Consultative Group felt that the decision should be suspended until 2023.

Upon being put to the vote, the Forum agreed to end the requirement for schools that are eligible for growth funding to submit a financial self-declaration from 2022/23.

RESOLVED: That the requirement for schools that are eligible for growth funding to submit a financial self-declaration, ends from the academic year 2022/23.

61. High Needs Block (inc Banding Tool update)

The Forum considered the regular report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities which forecast an overspend of £8.2m for the financial year 2021/22. This was due in part to the increase in number of EHCP's which had increased by 65% in the last five years and the use of the Independent sector.

It was reported that at the end of the last financial year the DSG reserve had gone into deficit by c£2m and it was expected that this would deepen given the expected overspend in 2021/22.

It was reported that this was a national concern, and the Local Authority would continue to lobby for extra funding. The Government had added an extra £325m to settlements for 2022/23 which would give Staffordshire an extra £4m. Despite this significant additional Government funding, increasing Staffordshire's High Needs Budget to £115m (c 14%), it was felt that this was insufficient to close the gap and it was likely that a further overspend would arise in 2022/23.

Officers informed the Forum that Government had written to the LA to ask if they wished to withdraw their request for additional funding given the £4m increased budget. It was intended that the request would stand and not be withdrawn.

Work to implement of the new Education Banding Tool (EBT) continued in line with the original implementation plan. However, to ensure the successful

implementation of the EBT, it had been agreed to delay the start date until April 2022.

With regard to the Prudential borrowing, it was estimated that the amount would continue to decline until 2037.

Following a question on what was being done to reduce demand for Independent sector placements, Members were informed that a SEND Contracts Manager had been appointed and it was their role to look at attendance reporting, holding the contracted independent providers to account and improve relations and efficiency in the system.

Home educated children was highlighted as an area of concern, particularly the ability for some parents to deliver a full curriculum. This would continue to be accessed.

The Forum was informed that following a recent Secondary Heads meeting it was felt by those present that there was a need for more alternative provision and funding into PRU's in order to keep children in mainstream schools. It was questioned why the PRU's were underspent and if they were accessible enough on a part time basis. Officers felt that there had been more investment in PRUs in recent years, with part time placements available across all PRU's. There were also 31 providers across Staffordshire who offered a wide range of alternative curriculum need/provision which are all detailed on the Local Offer. Part of the PRU underspend was due to Covid restricting movement.

It was suggested that the Lesley Calverley and Carolyn Knight, along with Kirsty Rogers (Maintained Pupil Referral Units) and the Chair, Richard Redgate (Academy Pupil Referral Units) be invited to the next meeting of the Secondary Head Teachers group to discuss the type of alternative provision that was available and or needed.

It was asked if there was any data which showed the net number of EHCPs and the predicted change as pupils got older and left education provision (0-25years). It was explained that the net number of EHCP's had increased by 400 per year but there were individuals who left the system but at various ages. This information was available if needed.

The Chair felt that there could be enough capacity in the Special schools to reduce the need for expensive independent sector placements, but in order to provide that, the children with less complex needs, needed to be better served in mainstream schools. The effectiveness of the Hubs needed to be evaluated to ensure improved outcomes could be achieved. A question on the comparison with the forecast spend for 2021/22 compared to 2020/21 and the allocation of funding to the various sectors was asked, the point being that mainstream schools needed to be funded appropriately if they are to support and keep children in that setting.

RESOLVED:

- a) The High Needs Block budget update 2021/22 and latest forecast outturn be noted.
- b) the update on the latest DSG government settlement be noted.
- c) the latest update on the development and roll out of a new Education Banding Tool be noted.
- d) Lesley Calverley; Carolyn Knight; Kirsty Rogers (Maintained Pupil Referral Units); and the Chair, Richard Redgate (Academy Pupil Referral Units) be invited to the next meeting of the Secondary Head Teachers group to discuss the type of alternative provision needed.

62. Date of next meeting and Work Programme

It was explained that meetings of the Forum had been arranged on the same day and at similar times of the year to provide consistency but that meeting could be held on other days if needed, subject to availability of rooms/Webcast support etc.

The next meeting of the Forum was scheduled for 24 March 2022, at 2pm.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted.

Chair