

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting held on 24 March 2022

Present: Richard Redgate (Chair)

Attendance

Kate Cooke	Julie Rudge
Richard Sutton	Anne Tapp
Steve Swatton	Alison Parr
Kim Prince Anson	Abigail Rourke
Jane Rutherford	Kelly Mitchell
Philip Siddell	Mark Boughey
Claire Shaw	Nadine Key
Chris Wright	Carolyn Trowbridge
Steve Barr (Vice-Chair)	Sarah Clark
Judy Wyman	Helen Baron
Claire Evans	Sadie Jones
Vicki Lewis	Karen Dobson

Observers: Councillor Mark Sutton (Official Observer), Councillor Jonathan Price (Official Observer), Alun Harding and Steve Breeze.

Also in attendance: Tim Moss, Lesley Calverley, Antony Humphreys, Will Wilkes, Carolyn Knight, Mandy Pattinson and Simon Humble.

Apologies: William Wilson, Kirsty Rogers, Kevin Allbutt, Jennie Westley, Jessica Roden and Emily Verow

PART ONE

63. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

64. Membership Update

Jenni Westley had informed the Secretary that she would be resigning as a member of the Schools Forum. Entrust had been contacted and would undertake the process to elect a new representative from the All Maintained Primary section in April 2022. Jenni was elected until May 2023, it was therefore suggested that the term on the newly elected member be extended until May 2025.

NOTED:

- a) That Jenni Westley had resigned as a member of the Schools Forum and that Entrust would be starting the process to elect a new member in April 2022.

65. Minutes of the last meeting held on 13 January 2022

The following points were raised:

1. **Minute 57.4 – High Needs Block – feedback received from the DfE.** The response from DfE was that the Local Authority needed to work collaboratively with the Schools Forum to approve the decision to switch to 0.5%. This process was undertaken as a lobbying position by SCC, but the DfE had confirmed that, unless the Schools Forum supported the proposal, the DfE would not override the decision. Colleagues at other local authorities had confirmed that the only authorities that had received approval to switch were those that had Schools Forum support.
2. **Minute 61 - High Needs Block (inc. Banding Tool update)** made reference to the appointment of a SEND contract manager. It was agreed that an update would be provided at the next Schools Forum meeting scheduled to take place in July 2022. The minute also referred to a conversation that had taken place between Secondary Heads relating to the alternative provision that was available and needed for Pupil Referral Units. It was suggested and agreed that a similar mechanism should be developed for Primary Heads.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the minutes of the meeting held on the 13 January 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

66. Decisions taken by the Chairman under delegated powers

None taken by the Chair since the last meeting.

67. Pupil Referral Unit and High School meeting Feedback

A verbal update was provided by Officers and Forum members who attended the Pupil Referral Unit and High School meeting.

Carolyn Knight provided feedback from the Pupil Referral Unit meeting. There were three main items to report. These were:

- Was there a need to review the SEND and Inclusions Hubs and District Inclusion Panels (DIPs) to ensure they met needs within an area;
- SEND Local offer. SEND Local Offer project manager contacted school to discuss issues and consider how they would be addressed;

- Concern about lack of suitable alternative provision for secondary pupils. Head Teachers were asked to speak with schools from other areas, to find what the particular needs were, and feedback. Meeting to be arranged with PRU Headteachers to see if gaps could be met or, if not, what might need to be commissioned.

Julie Rudge provided feedback from the High School meeting. The salient points of the meeting included:

- Heads wanted the Local Authority to know that they were doing all they could to be inclusive, but something needed to change with alternative provision;
- It was felt that the main challenge with alternative provision revolved around the funding of the PRUs and the lack of ability to plan for the future;
- It was felt that DIPs were successful at a secondary level. However, when they were “piggybacked” by SEND Hubs the provision weakened. It was felt that it was essential that DIPs were reinstated, and the professional support need to be available and fit for purpose;
- It was felt that there were risks in allowing districts to develop SEND Hubs as there would be very little central control. There was also a disproportionate level of involvement between Secondary and Primary Head Teachers, with Secondary being less represented;
- There were concerns with special school places in the area, with some being taken by out of area students. The Head Teachers were pleased to see the move toward earlier assessment for Staffordshire;
- To support the sustainability and financial stability of PRUs, the Local Authority was asked to ensure there was a financially strong model for PRUs across the County;
- It was felt that, in areas where there aren’t any PRUs, decisions were made to not send children to PRUs because of cost. The Head Teachers hoped for more graduated programmes that could be offered before the final decision to send to PRU;
- Head Teachers felt that a forum needed to be established to allow for open and transparent discussions to take place relating to the alternative provision available in primary and secondary schools.

Following a question relating to the issue of Hubs not working for children with SEND and the possible need to pause and evaluate, it was confirmed that a review would take place to assess this.

RESOLVED:

- a) That J Rudge share summary of Secondary Head Teacher’s meeting with C Knight.
- b) That a PRU Head Teacher meeting to discuss how this will fit with SEND and Inclusion Hubs will be arranged.

68. Notices of Concern and Licensed Deficit Agreements

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

69. High Needs Block

The Forum were presented with the regular report highlighting the latest position of the High Needs Block. The forecast outturn for the 2021/22 High Needs Block was £8.2m overspend, which shows no change from the position last reported. At the end of the last financial year the DSG reserve went into deficit by circa £2m and would deepen given the expected overspend in 2021/22. A 'deficit management plan' would be brought forward and a workshop to start this process had already taken place. Significant additional Government funding next year would see Staffordshire's High Needs Budget increase to £114.8m; an increase of £13.7m compared with 2021/22 (circa 13.6%). However, this would be insufficient to close the gap and it would be likely that a further overspend would arise in 2022/23. None of the funding increase would be used to repay historical deficits. The Council recognised the financial pressure schools across Staffordshire were facing and would increase funding next year for all state funded special schools, on a like for like basis, by a minimum of 2.5%. Work to implement the new Education Banding Tool continued in line with the original implementation plan and went live on 14 March 2022.

In response to a question relating to the issue of Independent Placements and the strategy in place to bring these numbers down, members were informed that the High Needs Working Group had looked at this designation alongside another piece of work to understand implications from tribunals. It was confirmed that a significant and wider piece of work would be undertaken which would involve a review of special provision across the County, including PRU provision and resource-based provision, whilst also looking at what could be done in the short-term.

It was explained that numbers in the independent sector had gone up because spaces weren't available in Staffordshire Special Schools. It was suggested that a quick win would be to try and get more children into the Staffordshire Special Schools by working with the assessment and placement team.

In response to a question relating to the introduction of the toolkit from 14th March, it was confirmed that independent special schools were not included as they determined their own rates.

In response to a question regarding the Deficit Management Plan and what would be introduced to move things forward, it was explained to the Forum that there were limited available strategies. The banding tool had never been

used as a mechanism to reduce resource, but could be considered in the future, along with utilising the available specialist places in Staffordshire for Staffordshire youngsters. It was also explained that the 5/6 non-statutory processes that were discussed by the working group would not cover the future deficit of £15m. It was reported that this was a national challenge, therefore Government were being looked to in terms of the expectations that had been set out.

In response to a question regarding the inclusion of SEND transport in the HNB Budget. It was confirmed that SEND Transport was statutory and had to be provided, but that further work on the implementation of the policy would be undertaken as part of the wider review.

In response to a question relating to the Special School Rates Education Banding Tool (Appendix C to the report), it was explained to the Forum how the new Banding Model would function. The Forum was informed that it would be difficult to understand the impact until the banding tool came into full force across all schools. Reviews would be built in, both termly and annually and the new model would be "needs led".

RESOLVED:

- a) That the updates to the High Needs Block following the report previously presented in January 2022 be noted.
- b) That the proposed High Needs Block budget 2022/23 be noted.
- c) That the latest update on the development and roll out of a new Education Banding Tool be noted.

70. Schools Budget Update

The Schools budget update for 2022/23 was presented to the Forum. The report focussed on Central Provisions, Individual School Budgets, Early Years Funding and High Needs Funding.

It was explained to the Forum that the growth fund budget had been set at £1.9m, and that underspend would be transferred into the Dedicated Schools Grant reserve, as per the deficit recovery plan. It was also explained that, although maintained schools approved a levy per pupil for Education Functions of £50.56 at the November meeting, there had been a slight change in the number on roll at maintained schools, therefore the final levy for 2022-23 had been set at £50.84 per pupil. The Forum was also informed that the budget also included a Minimum Funding Guarantee of +1% per pupil from the 2021-22 baseline. This ensured schools were protected from excessive year on year changes due to changes in pupil characteristics.

The Forum were informed that Early Years funding base rates had been set at £4.26 per hour for 3 & 4 year olds and £5.47 per hour for 2 year olds. A contingency fund had been set up to manage fluctuations in demand figures. This was equivalent of 0.8% of the whole Early Years DSG Block, which was lower than the 1% threshold advised by the workshop.

It was explained to the Forum that the Higher Needs Block funding for 2022/23 was c £114.8m, a net increase of £13.7m compared with 2021/22 (13.6%). It was also explained that, for 2022-23, Special School budgets would be set based on a Minimum Funding Guarantee of 2.5%, which was higher than the MFG set by Government of 0%.

In response to a question relating to the percentage of funding per pupil, it was explained that funding wasn't generated based on the number of pupils in the school, and there were a number of factors that affected the total amount of funding received.

In response to a question relating to the distribution of the Deprivational Supplement and the fact that a number of delegates no longer received the supplement, it was explained that the way in which the supplement was calculated hadn't changed. The metrics used by Government were reviewed every 5 years and were last changed in 2019. The Chair asked Philip Siddell to forward information to SCC officers who would look into the issue.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Schools budget update of 2022/23 be noted.

71. Date of next meeting and Work Programme

The future work programme, date of next meeting and future meetings were discussed.

Work Programme

The future work programme was presented to the Forum.

RESOLVED:

- a) That an update from the SEND Contract Manager be included in the next meeting.
- b) That the duplicated reference to the "Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair" be amended.
- c) That the Work Programme be noted.

Future Meetings

The Chair suggested the following alternative meeting arrangements for future meetings.

Normal year

Four meetings held per year.

Three meetings held virtually via Teams.

October meeting to be held in a face-to-face environment. County Buildings, Martin Street, Stafford.

Election year (of Chair and Vice-Chair)

Four meetings held per year.

Two meetings held virtually via Teams.

July meeting (election of Chair and Vice-Chair) and October meeting to be held in a face-to-face environment. County Buildings, Martin Street, Stafford.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the arrangements for future meetings be approved.

Date of next meeting

14 July 2022

RESOLVED: That the date of the next meeting be noted.

Chairman