

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting held on 4 October 2016

Present: Steve Barr (Chairman)

Attendance

Lesley Wells	Kevin Allbutt
Philip Tapp (Vice-Chairman)	Linda James
Wendy Horden	Steve Swatton
Ally Harvey	Judy Wyman
Sara Bailey	Claire Evans
David Ellison	
Chris Wright	
Jonathan Jones	

Observers: Ben Adams and John Francis

Also in attendance: Andrew Marsden, Tim Moss, Sarah Pitt, Alison Barnes, Will Wilkes and Julie Roberts

Apologies: Philip Siddell, Alison Gibson, Stuart Jones, Karen Dobson and Shelley Sharpe

PART ONE

Welcome

The Chairman welcomed the new representative for secondary academies, Ms Wendy Whelan, and the new Clerk to the Forum, Mrs Julie Roberts.

16. Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman

On nominations being requested, Mr Kevin Allbutt proposed and Ms Judy Wyman seconded that Mr Steve Barr be elected Chairman for the ensuing year and Mr Steve Barr proposed and Ms Judy Wyman seconded that Mr Philip Tapp be elected as Vice Chairman for the same period.

There being no other nominations it was:

RESOLVED – That Mr Steve Barr and Mr Philip Tapp be elected as Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively for the ensuing year.

17. Declarations of Interest

The Chairman, Steve Barr, and Judy Wyman both declared an interest in minute 23 being in receipt of some facilities time funding.

18. Minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 5 July 2016

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 5 July 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

19. Matters Arising and Decisions taken by the Chairman

In relation to the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) assessment and planning process members again expressed concern over transfers where the local authority was required to transfer appropriate statements of Special Educational Need to Education, Health and Care Plans. There had been cases where these had been inaccurate or did not reflect the needs of the child. The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills informed the Forum that this matter had been reported to the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee and suggested that a copy of the report be circulated to Forum members.

[Jason Woodruff, Deputy Head of Human Resources in attendance for discussion on this item of "Matters Arising"]

At their meeting of 5 July the Chairman informed members that he had requested a report on the County Council's review of redundancy arrangements. The Deputy Head of Human Resources had been invited to the meeting to provide an oral update on the current position. Members were informed that following preparatory work in 2015 by Human Resources in regard to redundancy payments and wider salary spend and then subsequent discussions with Cabinet Members and the Senior Leadership Team, a savings target of £1.98m was included within the Medium Term Financial Strategy, specifically related to the authority's salary spend.

The review had focused on redundancy payments, pay protection and redeployment mileage, subject to consultation with trade unions, with a view to reaching a new collective agreement. Although outside of the scope of the savings target, school budgets would be directly affected by any changes to payments that applied to school staff. Trade Unions had shared the proposals with their members and Teaching Unions were about to do so, it was anticipated that they would feed back in mid-October. In response to a query on timescales it was confirmed that a new agreement would be implemented as soon as possible, at least within the current financial year.

It was made clear that the update to the Forum was for information only and not in any way part of the consultation process. Following legal advice and in line with the authority's collective bargaining position, formal consultation was only able to be undertaken with the recognised trade unions and not employees or the wider workforce.

20. Schools Budget 2015-16: Final Outturn

The final outturn position for 2015-16 was a £0.506m under spend. This under spend had been combined with the unused DSG reserve from previous years resulting in a reserve balance of £8.233m.

There was an overspend of approximately £500k within the provision for two year old which had been identified as being caused by issues with the census data populated in

January 2016, as there were significant variations in the returns from providers. This issue was being investigated.

Members also received details on individual schools balances. Overall these had increased, mainly in primary and special schools and Pupil Referral Units. Members were reassured that where a school was giving cause for concern and had significant revenue balances, then a conversation would be held between the school and the local authority as to how balances were being used to improve outcomes for learners.

Members questioned why details on Academies were not included in the list. The response was that they did not have to provide this information, and there was also the risk that they may present the information in a different way, making comparison very difficult.

The Chairman queried the lateness of the submission of the Outturn report to Forum and was informed that this was due to particular issues this year and that in future it would be reported to the July meeting.

RESOLVED – That the intended application of the under spend be noted.

21. Behaviour Support Service

[Lesley Calverley, Senior Commissioning Manager - SEND and Deborah Barnes, Senior Teacher Consultant – Inclusion and Wellbeing in attendance for this item.]

Voting Forum Members had agreed that the current Behaviour Support model should remain for 2016-17, but had requested a further report detailing the impact of changes made to the Behaviour Support Service within Entrust over the last twelve months. This would help to inform the de-delegation vote for the 2017-18 financial year.

The Behaviour Support Service for Primary Schools was a centrally retained service until 2012-13, when it became a de-delegated service under Exception 1 of the Funding Reform requirements. The maintained primary schools had since voted annually to agree that the service should be provided centrally. The service is available to Primary Academies at a cost and can be purchased case by case or as a combined package of Behaviour Support and Inclusion Officer support.

Members were informed that a focus group of approximately 25 representatives of Staffordshire primary schools, special schools and pupil referral units had been established in February 2015. The group had identified several factors which they felt were contributing to an increase in challenging behaviour in schools, as demonstrated by an increase in the rate of primary permanent exclusions. Commissioners within the County Council were supporting a variety of initiatives in response to these concerns and the Primary Behaviour Support Service had been enhanced with specialists who could provide a high level of expertise and intervention.

The number of referrals to the service from both maintained and academy schools had increased in 2015-16. Members were informed that this increased uptake reflected the confidence of schools that the service could provide effective intervention in response to a higher number of pupils demonstrating challenging behaviour. Regular questionnaires

were sent to all maintained Staffordshire schools in order to evaluate the support provided via the Entrust Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Service. These questionnaires were issued in December 2015 and April 2016. Comments regarding the Primary Behaviour Support Team were very positive and frequently mentioned how valuable and professional the support provided was.

RESOLVED – That the positive impact of changes to the Entrust Primary Behaviour Support Service during the academic year 2015-16 be noted.

22. School Quality Assurance and Intervention - School Categorisation

At their meeting of 5 July Forum members had requested a report on the revised process for school categorisation, quality assurance and intervention.

In communication with schools in May 2016 the local authority set out the future policy direction for the organisation. This included the movement away from the direct involvement in the governance and accountability of schools. There was a commitment to maintaining an appropriate infrastructure for remaining local authority maintained schools, however the local authority is fully supportive of proposals for all schools to become academies.

Following changes to the service, the authority was developing strategies with Entrust to utilise available funding within the current service delivery agreement to continue to support schools through the categorisation process, which sets out how, working together with all mainstream school, the authority aimed to identify, support and challenge schools about which there were concerns.

Members questioned the capacity of the greatly reduced School Improvement Team. However, they were reassured that the process was done differently, and did not always involve individual visits to schools. It was agreed that whilst quality assurance sat with the authority, responsibility to deliver improvement lay with the school, where there was a lot of expertise.

Mrs Lesley Wells put forward the following proposal, and requested that it be included on the work programme:

“It is proposed that Schools Forum consider asking the local authority to devolve the funding for school improvement to elected groups of heads in the districts.

This arose from a recent meeting of 200 heads and chairs of governors where there was support for exploring this model further. We recognise that there will need to be time to debate how this would work in practice and to consider the relative strengths and issues of such an approach.”

The Chairman suggested that Forum could request a report setting out alternative models for devolving the funding for school improvement. The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills commented that in the light of the White Paper which proposed that responsibility for school improvement to be withdrawn and also that de-delegation be taken away from Schools Forums it would be sensible to look at alternatives for the future.

RESOLVED – That the content of the report be noted.

23. Facilities Time Funding 2017-18

[Mr Philip Tapp, Vice Chairman, in the Chair for this item. Mr Steve Barr and Ms Judy Wyman took no part in the item having declared an interest as being in receipt of some facilities funding.]

At their meeting of 5 July the Forum members had agreed to allocate, on a one-off basis, £32,039 to maintain the level of facilities time for trades union representation in maintained schools, provided the central underspend was more than this amount in the 2015-16 financial year. This sum matched that taken out of the allocation for Unison following the local authority’s decision not to fund union activities undertaken on behalf of schools.

Maintained school members were asked to consider two options for the funding which they wished to allocate to the recognised trades unions for facilities they provide for their members who work in schools in 2017-18, as follows:

Options	
Option 1 - existing	£202,320
Option 2	£234,320

Variance between options	
Primary (210 place)	£63.80
Secondary (900 place)	£259.20

It was noted that if option 2 was approved it would increase the budget for Union Duties and reduce the School Specific Contingency by the amount requested, to be divided proportionately between the primary and secondary sector.

RESOLVED – That option 2 be approved.

24. 2017-18 De-Delegation Vote

Under the government’s current funding rules there is an assumption of delegation for a number of budget areas which are currently held centrally for maintained schools and are delegated for academies. Maintained schools’ representatives on the Schools Forum vote, by phase and on behalf of the schools they represent, to de-delegate these areas where it is proposed by the local authority. The outcome of the vote is binding for all maintained schools of that phase.

The authority proposed the option of de-delegation for all of these areas for 2017-18 to enable the Schools Forum to vote on each area, with the vote carried out at this time to enable schools and services time to plan for their budgets and responsibilities for 2017-18. Areas proposed for de-delegation for 2017-2018 were:

Budget Area	Primary £m	Secondary (including middle) £m
Insurances (mainly premises related)	1.834	2.479

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	0.507	Delegated

As requested at their meeting in October 2015 members received a more detailed explanation in the background report to help them in their consideration of each category.

Having considered these areas, the voting Forum Members for each phase agreed that the decision taken last year for each phase and for each area should stand again for 2017-18, that being that all but the secondary behaviour support services remain centrally funded as shown above.

Members noted that, following their earlier approval of the Facilities Time Funding, the budget for Union Duties would be increased to £234,320 and that the School Specific Contingency will be reduced by the amount of the increase (£32,000), to be divided proportionately between the primary and secondary sector.

RESOLVED – That the results of the vote taken by maintained schools members on each area for 2016-17 are agreed again for 2017-18, subject to the budget for Union Duties being increased to £234,320 and the School Specific Contingency being reduced by the amount requested, divided proportionately between the primary and secondary sector.

25. Update on the Work of Local Support Teams and their Impact on Outcomes for School-Age Children and Young People

[Karl Hobson, County Manager - Targeted Services, and Nicky Crookshank, Headteacher, Cheslyn Hay Sport and Community High School in attendance for this item.]

At their meeting on 5 July 2016 the Forum received an update from the Schools and Local Support Working Partnership Group on the work of Families First Local Support Teams and school representatives in the last 12 months to address issues raised by schools through consultation in Spring/Summer 2015. Forum had agreed to receive a further report from the Group in October and to consider their recommendations, which were made in the light of the outcomes of a county-wide satisfaction survey conducted in July 2016. This was a repeat of the survey conducted in September 2015 and was designed to explore the views of school leaders in the quality and effectiveness of the work of Families First Local Support Teams (LSTs).

The survey results showed a positive direction of travel overall in terms of school satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of the work of LSTs. Areas remained where improvements needed to be either secured or accelerated, but schools on the Working Group agreed that the increase in satisfaction was encouraging.

In relation to membership of the Working Group members were encouraged to extend invitations to head teachers, heads of pastoral care or special needs co-ordinators. Members noted that there were no representatives for the Lichfield and Newcastle areas, and Judy Wyman and Wendy Whelan agreed to pursue this matter.

In recognising the difference in the level of satisfaction between the primary and secondary sector it was acknowledged that the funding needed to be spent differently, and that new ways of working across children's services would be explored. Members expressed concern at the high level of dissatisfaction in the secondary sector. Members commented that in the light of the White Paper it would be important to set up appropriate timescales and have a plan in place moving towards the forthcoming changes. Forum was assured that a lot of work was being done investigating different ways of working and that the LSTs were heavily involved in a number of pilots. Having acknowledged and listened to the concerns raised, funding for an additional year would allow for a considered and properly supported transition to take place. The Chairman requested that a further report be brought to the December meeting outlining possible solutions to resolve the issues with the secondary sector. Members felt that they needed to see firm proposals to improve the service to secondary schools to increase satisfaction levels.

Members queried the percentage of referrals which were "stepped up", as there were concerns that Education Funding could be being used to supplement the Social Care budget. Karl Hobson pointed out that a protocol was in place to settle any disagreements over thresholds, but undertook to request further information on top tier three complex cases.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the progress made by Families First in partnership with Head Teacher representatives since the report to the Forum in December 2015 be noted;
- b) the outcomes of the repeated survey to school leaders on their views of the effectiveness of Local Support Team work to support school aged children and their families be noted; and
- c) the proposal for continued funding for Local Support Team services from the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2017/18 be approved.

26. Notices of Concern

[Ian Wilkie, Principal Business Partner, Entrust, in attendance for this item]

There were no new notices of concern reported at this meeting. Following the amendment to the protocol for issuing of Notices of Concern at the last meeting work was currently being undertaken to establish an objective criterion by which to assess whether a school judged as Requiring Improvement was also causing financial concern. A further update, along with any resulting Notices would be reported at the next meeting.

27. Work Programme

Members requested the following additions/amendments to their work programme:

- a) that a report be brought to the December Forum meeting on alternative models for devolving the funding for School Improvement;
- b) that an update on the progress of the Local Support Teams, specifically on proposals for possible solutions to resolve issues with the secondary sector, be brought to the December meeting; and
- c) that an update on the establishment of an objective criterion by which to assess whether a school judged as Requiring Improvement was also causing financial concern be reported to the December meeting.

28. Fairer Funding

The Forum received an oral report on Fairer Funding. There had been a consultation on Early Years funding in August, with a deadline of 22 September. Indicative figures were not as high as had been hoped for as an area cost adjustment had been applied. Concern had been raised in response to this, and also the Government's proposal to flatten the rate.

RESOLVED – That the oral report be noted.

29. Date of next meeting

RESOLVED – That the next Schools Forum meeting be scheduled for 7 December 2016, 2.00 pm, Kingston Centre, Stafford.

Chairman