

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting held on 7 December 2016

Present: Steve Barr (Chairman)

Attendance

Wendy Whelan	Steve Swatton
Philip Siddell	Derek Watson
Claire Shaw	Judy Wyman
Stuart Jones	Sara Bailey
Philip Tapp (Vice-Chairman)	Chris Wright
Kevin Allbutt	

Observers: Ben Adams, Richard Hinton, Richard Lane, Liz Threlkeld

Also in attendance: Alison Wood, Alison Barnes, Will Wilkes, Julie Roberts and Tim Moss

Apologies: Lesley Wells, Karen Dobson, Wendy Horden, Ally Harvey, David Ellison, Jonathan Jones, John Francis and Claire Evans

30. Minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 4 October 2016

RESOLVED – That, subject to the inclusion of Wendy Whelan in the list of attendees and apologies being recorded for Claire Shaw, the minutes of the Schools Forum meeting held on 4 October 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

31. Matters Arising and Decisions taken by the Chairman

The Chairman read out a letter which had been received from the Chairman of the William Salt Library Trust, who were seeking to appoint further trustees as the Trust embarked on a major and ambitious venture to create, in partnership with the County Council, the Staffordshire History Centre. The Trust was contacting the Forum to ask if they could suggest a Headteacher or Head of History who had a particular interest in local history and its promotion in schools. Members were invited to contact the Chairman or Clerk of the Forum should they wish to respond to this request.

In relation to membership of the Forum, a number of members' terms of office were due to come to an end in May 2017. The Chairman request that they notify himself or the Clerk if they were prepared to carry on for another term of office.

It was not possible to provide an update on the progress over redundancy arrangements, as the timescales had been put back and HR were still in consultation with recognised Trade Unions. Concern was expressed over the impact of this delay on schools' ability to set their budgets and it was requested that Union representatives emphasise the importance of completing this process.

With regard to the request made at the last meeting for a report on alternative models for devolving the funding for school improvement the Chairman pointed out that this had been included on the Work Programme for today's meeting. However, it was agreed that this was an unrealistic timescale and that this would be included on the Work Programme for a future meeting.

32. Schools Budget 2017-18: Central Expenditure

[Craig Morris and Andrew Watterson from Entrust and Stuart Lane from the Strategic Property Team in attendance for this item]

The Chairman informed Forum that since the budget report had been circulated with the papers for the meeting, further guidance had been received from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) on Schools Revenue Funding, which superseded some of the details contained in the original report. A briefing note on the further guidance was tabled for information.

The Schools Forum had oversight of the Schools Budget and was required by the Finance Regulations to annually approve the amounts for particular budget headings within the central expenditure. Guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE) on the New National Funding Formula had outlined precisely what was permitted as a historical commitment and could therefore be held centrally. In the light of this Forum was being asked to approve delegation of the budgets for Termination of Employment costs and Capital Expenditure from Revenue (CERA), as these were believed to be at greatest risk of clawback from the DfE.

All of the central budget headings were approved. This included:

- Part 1 – Central Services, including the delegation of Termination of Employment Costs and CERA. These services would no longer be funded through DSG central expenditure, but still could be retained centrally as part of the Schools block retention of former ESG duties.
- Part 2 – Central Schools Expenditure.
- Part 3 – Early Years Expenditure.

Stuart Lane from the Property Team outlined the requirements which schools would have to comply with by delegating the CERA budget to schools, in that they would need to provide the property team with assurances that work had been done or services provided, to the appropriate standard.

Up until 2017-18, Education Services Grant (ESG) was made up of two rates that “notionally” funded two different groups of services:

- The **retained duties rate**. This was for local authorities to fund services provided to all schools, including academies (£15 per pupil).
- The **general duties rate**. This was for local authorities to fund services provided to maintained schools. Academies were funded separately and provided the services themselves (in 2016-17 the authority was funded at £77 per maintained pupil. This funding would cease to exist from September 2017, with a transitional rate of £50 per pupil for the financial year 2017-18 which equated to £20 per pupil

for the 5 months from April to August. This would result in a shortfall of income in the region of £2m for the authority.)

In practice this grant had been treated as a non ring-fenced grant and therefore had not been linked to expenditure.

The recent guidance on Schools Revenue Funding 2017-2018 published by the EFA on 1 December 2016 stated that the **general duties rate** was ending, with transitional protection until September 2017, and funding previously allocated through the ESG **retained duties rate** would be transferred into the schools block.

The amount to be retained by the local authority would need to be agreed by the relevant maintained school members of the Schools Forum (primary, secondary, special and PRUs). The retained duties would be voted on by all schools including academies. The duties previously funded by general ESG funding would be voted on by maintained schools representatives only.

Compliance and preventative maintenance services (previously funded as Capital Expenditure from Revenue, CERA) had previously been funded from DSG central expenditure. There was an opportunity for maintained schools Forum members to agree to retaining funds centrally from maintained schools budgets so that the local authority continued to hold compliance and preventative services responsibility. This was because general landlord duties for all maintained schools were included within the ESG duties.

The budget settlement for 2017-18 was not yet known, and therefore the figures outlined in the report were indicative. Final figures would be presented to the Schools Forum at their March meeting. However, the deadline for submission of the final 2017-18 schools budget to the EFA was 20 January 2017.

Following wide ranging discussion of this matter, it was agreed that this was a sufficiently important issue to warrant a single item agenda Extraordinary Meeting of the Forum. Owing to the tight timescales involved it was proposed that this should be held on 11 January 2017. It was also agreed that it would be helpful to set up a meeting for a Working Group of officers and members to feed into the Extraordinary Meeting. Members wishing to join the Working Group should contact either the Chairman or the Clerk.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) all of the central budget headings be approved, as outlined above;
- b) an Extraordinary Meeting of the Forum be held on Wednesday 11 January 2017;
and
- c) a Budget Working Group meeting be held in advance of the Extraordinary Meeting.

33. Progress on the Development of Proposals for More Effective Engagement and Support from Local Support Teams, for Schools in the Secondary Sector

At their meeting on 4 October 2016 Forum had received an update on the work of Local Support Teams (LSTs) and had noted the contrast in satisfaction levels about their effectiveness between schools in the primary and secondary sectors. Primary schools were far more likely to be satisfied than secondary schools with the impact that that LSTs had on key issues for their students and their families. Consequently Forum had asked for a report for this meeting which would demonstrate progress on proposals for possible solutions to resolve issues highlighted by schools in the secondary sector.

Since the Forum meeting in October discussions had taken place with the Schools and Local Support Partnership Working Group, which was initially set up in Spring 2015 to drive and manage the programme of review by schools of the impact and quality of the work of LSTs with school aged children and their families. The Group had since expanded and re-shaped its terms of reference, acting as an advisory body to Families First for the continued improvement and performance management of LSTs. The purpose of the discussion was to draw out the elements that schools felt best demonstrated the potential for effective “added value” on the part of LSTs, and to begin to shape a framework within which schools in the secondary sector could play a more significant role as local partners in determining the shape of support for children and families in their local areas. Forum were given examples of local pilot projects which were being undertaken across the Districts.

School representatives at the Schools and Local Support Partnership Working Group were keen to highlight the following points:

- Schools’ engagement in the commissioning of early help services can promote the development of stronger and more integrated working between schools and early help services.
- Engaging schools with the voluntary and community sector provides excellent opportunities for expanding local support for families, particularly where that support incorporates a focus on reducing isolation, securing involvement, practical steps to address poverty and disadvantage, and modelling effective parenting.
- Effective targeting of vulnerable individuals, groups and communities worked well when done in partnership using the collective intelligence not just of schools and the authority, but also of other public sector partners such as the Police and district councils.

In relation to the number of cases stepped down to LSTs from statutory social work concern was expressed over the increase in workload for them, and the potential knock on effect on schools.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the progress made by Families First, in partnership with Headteacher representatives, to develop proposals for LSTs to work more effectively with schools in the secondary sector be noted; and
- b) a further update be included on the Work Programme for the Summer 2017 meeting.

34. Notices of Concern and Review of Protocol

To reduce the risk of deficit from any phase of sponsored academy, members decided to review the protocol for issuing the notice of concern at an earlier stage in the process. This would protect the dedicated schools grant contingency pot at an earlier stage and therefore reduce the risk of deficits on transfer to sponsored academy.

On consideration of a report in July 2016 members decided that rather than wait for an academy order for academy sponsorship a notice should be issued in the following circumstances:

- When judged to be in Special Measures by Ofsted; or
- When judged to be Requiring Improvement and also causing financial concern.

An objective criteria was therefore required in order to determine when a school may be causing financial concern. The following indicators were currently used to determine the level of concern over a school's financial situation:

- a) More than 50% of reserves used to set the budget.
- b) Predicted reserves of less than 5% of the Schools Budget Share, or the amount required to set a balanced budget in the following financial year, whichever is the greatest.
- c) Greater than average % spend within the year as detailed in the following table:

Month	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Average % spent	8.3	16.7	25.0	33.3	41.7	50.0	58.3	66.7	75.0	83.3	91.7	100.0

It was therefore recommended that where a school was judged to be requiring improvement and at least one of the above criteria is present then a notice of concern would be issued until either Ofsted amend their judgement or the financial concerns are addressed.

Since the last Forum meeting the County Council had issued the following Notices of Concern:

Horton Lodge Community Special Inability to set a Balanced budget

Bird's Bush Primary Sponsored Directive Academy Order

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the updated Notice of Concern Protocol be approved; and
- b) the issue of a Notice of Concern to the schools listed above be noted.

35. Work Programme

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

- a) that the Membership Review be brought forward to the Spring Term meeting;
- b) that the self-assessment toolkit in the EFA Revised Guidance on Schools Forums be included for the Summer Term meeting; and
- c) that a report be brought to the Spring Term meeting on the new finance system which is to replace SAP.

36. Fairer Funding

The Forum received an oral report on Fairer Funding. There was to be a 14 week consultation on Schools in High Need, and the Early Years Consultation had now ended.

RESOLVED – That the oral report be noted.

37. Date of next meeting

RESOLVED – That the next Schools Forum meeting be scheduled for 27 March 2017, 2.00 pm, Kingston Centre, Stafford.

Chairman