

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting held on 15 July 2021

Present: Richard Redgate (Chair)

Attendance

Kim Prince Anson	Jonathan Price (Observer)
Kirsty Rogers	Kelly Mitchell
Chris Wright	Andrew Shaw
Steve Barr (Vice-Chair)	Mark Boughey
Judy Wyman	Nadine Key
Claire Evans	Carolyn Trowbridge
Vicki Lewis	Sarah Clark
Julie Rudge	Helen Baron
Les McDowell	Jessica Roden
Alison Parr	Sadie Jones

Observers: Official Observer: Jonathan Price. Observers: Alun Harding and Steve Breeze.

Also in attendance: Lesley Calverley, Andrew Marsden, Tim Moss, William Wilkes, Melanie Scott and Mandy Pattinson.

Apologies: Jane Rutherford (School issue), Kevin Allbutt (School issue), Mark Sutton (work commitment), Jennie Westley (lecture commitment), Keith Hollins (School issue), Anne Tapp (School issue), Abigail Rourke (School issue), Philip Siddell (Sent Substitute) and Karen Dobson (DfE meeting).

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

PART ONE

34. Declarations of Interest

Tim Hopkins, substitute for Philip Siddell, declared that he was a Trustee of a Free School in the County (Growth Fund report).

35. Membership Update Report

The Chair welcomed the new members to the Forum. It was reported that there was still a vacancy for a Secondary Academy representative. Emily Verow from the Three Spires Trust was nominated.

The Forum was requested to add Alun Harding to its membership as a non-voting observer with speaking rights. This was agreed.

A complete membership list was provided for information

RESOLVED:

- a) That Emily Verow be appointed to represent the Secondary Academy Schools for a four-year term up until May 2025.
- b) That Alun Harding be included as a non-voting observer to the forum with speaking rights.
- c) That the updated membership list be noted.

36. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2021

RESOLVED: That subject to the following amendment, the minutes of the Schools Forum held on 25 March 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair:

‘Under minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 January second paragraph, after £1,300 add ‘per pupil’.

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

- Since the last meeting the pupil premium figure had been revised to £1,345 per pupil.
- Under minute item 30 School Forum Constitution – it was reported that the Consultation Committee had asked for the non attendance of members to be reduced to 2 consecutive meetings rather than 3. This would be kept under review.
- DfE consultation on proposals to the national spending formula, had seen the wider consultation start earlier this week and it was requested that this be publicised to the schools and governors through the school bag with a summary (if possible).
- Individual student outcomes were reviewed and evaluated through the annual review process. Educational establishments were reviewed separately through the annual review process, Ofsted inspections and at the end of a child’s key stage review. Recently introduced was an attendance check which was part of the contract with independent schools.
- Special school head teachers had offered to help the recovery group to evaluate efficiency.

37. Decisions taken by the Chairman under delegated powers

No decisions had been made by the Chairman since the last meeting.

38. Notices of Concern and Licensed Deficit Agreements

Notices of concern had been withdrawn from Greenhall Nursery and St Peters, Caverswall, both schools had finished 2020/21 with in year surpluses and had set balanced budgets for 2021/22.

There had been no new notices of concern or licensed deficits issued since the last meeting.

It was reported that following a query to the Department of Education (DfE), we’ve received confirmation that where a school and its nursery share a single registration then the two budgets

should be offset against each other. As a result, consideration will be given to nursery budgets, where there is single registration, alongside the Individual Schools Budgets, going forwards.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

39. Growth Fund

Each summer, Schools Forum are advised of the funding allocations made in accordance with the Forum's approved Growth Fund criteria, At the 25 March 2021 meeting, the forum had approved an increased growth fund of £2,000,000. Details of the funding allocations for the 2021/22 academic year were listed in the report. The allocations had left an underspend of £1,558,506 which would be contributed to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) balances.

Following a question on the main differences between the free school presumption process and the wave process, it was explained that the presumption process would be followed by a Local Authority (LA) if they wished to open a free school. The LA would identify need, publish a specification and invite approved academy trusts to submit applications to open the school (akin to a recruitment process). The costs of the buildings and revenue would be provided by the LA. The alternative 'wave' process was used when an academy trust wished to apply to open a free school. This process would be led by the DfE with the majority of building costs and revenue costs funded by the DfE. In both cases, the final decision on the academy sponsor is taken by the Secretary of State for Education.

To reduce administrative burdens during Covid-19, for a second year, schools were not asked to submit financial self-declarations, showing information on the three previous financial years. It was asked if this would continue post Covid. The forum was informed that this would be a decision for the forum at a future meeting.

The underspend of £1.5m was referred to under the next agenda item.

RESOLVED: That the following allocations of growth fund be noted:

- a) funding for infant class size legislation: 1 primary school
- b) funding for exceptional basic need growth: 1 primary school; 3 secondary schools
- c) funding for new schools: pre-opening costs for 2 new free school opening in 2022/23 and post-opening costs for 3 free schools opened in 2019/20 and 2021/22.

40. Schools Budget 2020/21 Final Outturn

The outturn position for 2020/21 was a £2.4 variance (0.7%) overspend on planned expenditure across all services. A summary of the balances were shown in the report.

It was explained that the High Needs Block (HNB) service had overspent by £5.9m (4.5%). The pressure areas in the service were top up budgets which overspent by £5.3m and expenditure on independent schools which overspent by £2.7m. This had been offset by underspends in other areas within the service, for example the allocation for the Hubs which had underspent by £1.6m and Post 16 provision which had

underspent by £0.3m. The increase in the High needs services was due to numbers accessing the service and the complexity of need.

As a result of the on-going overspend in the HNB, over the last few years the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) reserve has been fully depleted and could no longer be used as a buffer to fund this on-going pressure. At the end of 2020/21 the DSG reserve had gone into deficit (overdrawn) by approximately £2m.

The LA was not alone in this position with most authorities faced the same financial risk. Further recovery action was required.

It was explained that the early years underspend of £0.8m did not include the redistribution of the contingency. The contingency of £0.6m had been redistributed to the sector. The underspend of £0.8m was based on the number of children attending provision and was not part of the contingency fund. The underspend would go towards the DSG reserves and would help to respond to the overall end of year position.

In relation to the school balances, as at 31st March 2021 maintained schools held reserves of £22.1m; an increase of £6.6m from the position at 31st March 2020. Whilst there continued to be a number of approved licenced deficits (12 schools, with a value of £1.4m), this had significantly improved from the end of the previous year (14 schools totalling £2.4m). The funding of these was met from school balances until such time as the school repaid the deficit.

The school by school breakdown report which was previously available to the forum only provided part of the picture as it only covered maintained schools. The other 254 academy schools were not included. Following a vote on whether the information was to be provided to the Forum, it was agreed that the number of schools and amounts involved was enough information and detail was not needed.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

41. High Needs Block

The Forum considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities which provided a detailed update on the High Needs Block (HNB) funding.

It was reported that the HNB for 2021/22 was £101m an increase of £11.6m on the previous year. The forecast overspend was £7.5m, despite the increase in Government funding. The increase in funding was helping to address the increasing demand and cost of provision but it had not addressed the original deficit gap.

This was a national concern and the LA was continuing to lobby Government for more funding as this posed a significant financial risk to the Local Authority.

Work was taking place on the SEND and District inclusion model, but this was a long term working model which would take time to relieve financial pressure. The deficit recovery plan would need to be reviewed in order to address the immediate pressure. The Government had acknowledged that this was a challenge across the nation and as

part of the SEND review they had indicated that this would be an item in the comprehensive spending review later this year but at this stage it was unclear what the impact would be.

The Chair reported that notes of the forums working group would be emailed out to members in due course. He also asked for a report to the next meeting updating Members on the Working Groups progress and the Educational Banding Tool.

Statistical and comparable neighbours had been contacted to ensure that any lessons that could improve the situation had been learnt.

A financial update from the DfE was expected soon and the Forum would be informed in due course.

A question was asked on the HNB debt and if there was any surplus from Health Partners to cover some of the Health provision which was now provided within special schools such as accompanying pupils to physio therapy sessions. It was reported that this had been raised with the Joint Commissioning Group and will continue to be pursued.

RESOLVED:

- a) The update on the High Needs Block 2021/22 and latest forecast outturn be noted.
- b) That the update on the development and roll out of a new Education Banding Toolkit be noted.

42. Work Programme

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

43. Appointment of Chair

RESOLVED: That Richard Redgate be elected as Chair of the Schools Forum for a two year period until July 2023.

44. Appointment of Vice Chair

RESOLVED: That Steve Barr be elected as Vice Chair of the Schools forum for a two year period until July 2023.

Chair