

SCHOOLS FORUM: MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 16 December 2020

Time: 10.00am – 10.55am

Venue: Virtual meeting in line with the Schools Forums (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 making provisions to enable schools forums to meet remotely while they are unable to meet physically in a room during the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID19)

Present:

Maintained Primary Heads - Liz Bassett, Sasha Howard and Guy Underwood

Academy Primary - Susannah Connell

Other Academy Sector Appointments - Christopher Bennet, Jonathan Culpin (Chairman), Ryan Kellsall, John King and Richard Spencer

Maintained Pupil Referral Unit – Leah Miller

Early Years Reference Group - Deborah Parfitt

Post 16 Further Education - Jeremy Lloyd

Maintained Governor - Paul Stratford (Vice-Chairman)

Maintained Nursery School - Claire Palmer

Maintained Special School - Joanne Hardwick

Academy Special School - Simon Bainbridge

Cambridgeshire County Council - Councillor Simon Bywater, Councillor Peter Downes and Councillor Simone Taylor

Observers - Jon Duveen (Teachers Unions), Julie Cornwall,) and Andrew Read (Diocese of East Anglia), Joe Mc-Crossan (Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia).

Officers - J Lewis, Service Director Education, T Oviatt-Ham – Democratic Services Officer, R Sanderson, Democratic Services Officer and Clerk to Forum and M Wade, Strategic Finance Business Partner.

Apologies: Other Academy Sector Appointments: Adrian Ball and Patsy Peres

Quorum on current voting membership: 8

167. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies received from Adrian Ball, Patsy Peres and Joe McCrossan

No declarations of interest were made.

168. Schools Forum Minutes – 6 November 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2020 were approved as a correct record.

169. Minutes Action Log

The Forum noted the Minute Action Log.

170. Update on Schools Forum Membership

The Forum received a report that provided an update on current membership position of forum.

Introducing the report officers explained that there were four vacancies for the Academies. The Service Director: Education stated that he would speak to Andrew Reed to establish a way forward for filling the vacancies ahead of the next meeting. **(ACTION)**

It was resolved to:

note the current position on vacancies on Schools Forum.

171. School Funding Update Report – December 2020

The Forum considered a report that provided an update on the latest position in respect of the Schools Budget setting process for 2021/22 and addressed some of the questions raised at the previous meeting of Schools Forum in November.

The Service Director, Education and the Strategic Finance Business Partner gave a joint presentation of the report that provided information to support the 2021/22 Schools budget setting process and covered the following areas:

- Update on 2021/22 School Budgets
- Insurance arrangements
- Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) position and historical spend
- Central School Services Block
- High Needs Block
- Next Steps

School Budgets 2021/22

The Service Director, Education explained that at the Children and Young People (CYP) Committee on the 10th November the Committee approved the submission of a disapplication request to the Secretary of State for Education for a transfer of funding of 1.0%, approximately £3.8m between the Schools Block and High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant for the 2021/22 school budget setting process. As such a disapplication request was submitted by the 20th November deadline and a response is expected in due course. He explained that even if this was approved by the Secretary of State this did not necessarily mean that it would be applied. He clarified that final approval of the schools formula would be made at the CYP Committee meeting on 19th January 2021.

The Service Director, Education explained that the Spending Review announcements on the 25th November 2020 reaffirmed the previous commitment to increase the core schools budget by £7.1 billion by 2022/23, compared to 2019/20 funding levels, this resulted in an increase of £2.2 billion between 2020/21 and 2021/22. He clarified that Early Years Education would receive an increase of £44m in 2021/22 to increase the hourly rate paid to childcare providers for the government's free hours offers. He explained that it was understood that the maintained schools supplementary grant had been extended for the 2021-22 academic year, although he clarified that this was yet to be confirmed. He stated that there had been no further detail in respect of exactly what these announcements would mean for the final 2021/22 DSG. He explained that the expectation was that final DSG allocations and the revised Authority Proforma Tool (APT) were to be published by the end of the week.

The Strategic Finance Business Partner explained that he had just received the APT proforma used to populate the budget position. He clarified that table 2.5 in the report outlined the current indicative block figures and showed a net reduction in primary figures and an increase in secondary figures. He explained that Special Schools sector had seen an increase in numbers of 150 pupils. He explained that table 2.6 in the report showed the latest position of the growth fund element. He clarified that following receipt of the revised October census numbers a revised estimate of growth funding to be received had been calculated. In 2020/21 the growth fund element of the DSG totaled £3.125m, the revised estimate for 2021/22 totaled £3.2m.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to School Budgets 2021/22 section of the report:

- Highlighted that Cambridgeshire had the seventh largest deficit in the High Needs Block.
- Raised concern in relation to the number of Special School places available. A member of forum commented that there was a significant number of Head teachers holding pupils in primary that needed special school places and that they were being told that there were no spaces until September 2022. The Service Director, Education stated

that the authority was unable to negotiate the modelling on special schools. He explained that the authority would require more funding for high needs places and this would need to be done through the top slice. He clarified that there were two new Special Schools now on line and that a new round of funding was opening up and that the authority would potentially bid on it. He explained that he was working closely with MPs on this issue and that letters had gone to the Secretary of State for Education. The Chairman queried whether Section 106 money could be used for Special Schools. The Service Director, Education stated that it was down to individual negotiations as there was no set formula. He explained that there had been a Special School recently set up in Alconbury but that revenue costs for Special Schools were not supported in any way through Section 106.

Insurance Arrangements for 2021/22

The Strategic Finance Business Partner explained that in order to allow schools and governors to take a more informed view on insurance arrangements additional information was subsequently circulated to maintained schools and a short survey undertaken. He clarified that the results of this survey were outlined in section 3.2 of the report. He explained that the results clearly showed overwhelming support to remain with the Local Authority Scheme.

DSG Position In-Year and Historical Spend

The Strategic Finance Business Partner stated that appendix A of the report provided details of the DSG spend for 2018/19, 2019/20 and current forecasts for 2020/21. He explained that the in-year DSG position is presented to CYP committee as part of the overall finance monitoring report whenever they meet and the current revised forecast for 2020/21 was now a £11.3m pressure, down from the original £12.7m forecast at the start of the year. He clarified that the budget figures were gross and therefore include £249.6m of recoupment for primary and secondary academies, and a further £12.7m of recoupment for High Needs Places (academy special schools, units, further education etc.). He explained that he would ensure that the Forum received the in year position of the budget at every forum meeting. **(ACTION)**

Central School Services Block

The Strategic Finance Business Partner highlighted that the Central Schools Service Block had been discussed in great detail at the last forum meeting. He explained that the table at 5.2 of the report showed the current year budgets. He explained that contribution to the combined budgets had reduced including the internet contract. He stated that invoices for the internet contract would be sent out in April 2021. He explained that there had been no change to the School Admissions amounts and that they were waiting for a figure on national copyright. The Service Director, Education explained that 5.5 of the report listed where the budget allocations were going. He stated that further information had been requested by schools forum in

respect of the £733k for Early Intervention Family Workers (EIFW) which moved into the Alternative Education Provision Service on the 1st April 2020, and was now managed by Anna Wahlandt (County Manager) and Michael Kaoura (Deputy County Manager). He explained that the service currently had seven vacancies which transferred over and predominantly sat within Cambridge City. He stated that the service had endeavored to cover requested support where possible and hoped to begin a recruitment drive in January 2021. The original planned recruitment process had been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

High Needs Block

The Service Director, Education explained that 6.3 – 6.5 of the report set out the current position of the High Needs Block and that there had been a focus on high cost placements. He explained that the authority wanted to ensure that these placements were well commissioned and that the providers were held to account.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the High Needs Block section of the report:

- Welcomed the review of Enhanced Resource Bases (ERBs) and the arrangements for the newly established SEND Strategic Commissioning Board to review the arrangements going forwards.
- Raised concern about the number of requests coming through for ERBs as there were 20 places but 160 requests for placements. The Service Director, Education explained that there were conversations taking place about bulk buying to drive costs down. He explained that officers were working with colleagues in Peterborough so that they were in a more positive position to have the conversation with higher numbers regarding value for money.
- Queried if there was any particular work on parts of the County where pressures were the greatest for the Autism (ASD) and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) placements. The Service Director, Education explained that there was a large efficiency review taking place and officers were mapping where children were going from – to. He stated that a new special school was being built in Northstowe, the Martin Baker Academy, in order to keep children at school closer to home. He stated that officers were aware of the gaps in East Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Huntingdonshire.

Next Steps

The Service Director, Education set out the next steps in the process highlighted at 7.1 in the report.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. note and comment on the contents of the report.
2. comment on the results of the consultation in respect of ongoing insurance arrangements.
3. approve the continued LA insurance de-delegation arrangements at £21 per pupil.
4. approve the following on a line by line basis:
 - a) Capital Expenditure from Revenue (CERA)
 - b) School Admissions
 - c) Servicing of Schools Forum

172. Schools Forum Agenda Plan Update

The Forum noted the following reports on the agenda for the next Forum meeting on 16 December:

- Schools Funding Update
- New dates for Forum beyond July 2021

It was resolved to:

note the agenda plan.

Date of Next Meeting

The Chairman thanked Democratic Services and Officers in the Education team for all of their support to Schools Forum throughout an extremely difficult year.

The Cambridgeshire Schools Forum will meet next on Friday 15 January 2021 at 10am.

Chairman