

## **CAMBRIDGESHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM: MINUTES**

**Date:** Friday 20 April 2018

**Time:** 10.00am – 11.15am

**Place:** Kreis Viersen Room, Shire Hall, Cambridge

**Present:** P Hodgson (Chairman), Dr A Rodger (Vice Chairman), S Blyth, T Davies, J Digby, J Lancaster-Adlam, A Matthews, D Parfitt, Dr K Taylor OBE, R Waldau and M Woods (from 11.05am)

### **Observers**

Councillor S Bywater	Cambridgeshire County Council
Councillor P Downes	Cambridgeshire County Council

### **Officers**

J Lewis, J Lee, Dr H Phelan and R Greenhill (Clerk)

### **Apologies:**

Forum Members: A Goulding, L Calow, J North, S Tinsley

Observers: S Conant, G Fewtrell, Councillor J Whitehead

## **50. MEMBERSHIP**

The Chairman welcomed Jane Lancaster-Adlam, Head of School at TBAP Unity Academy, to her first meeting since being appointed as the Academy Alternative Provision representative.

## **51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies were noted as recorded above. There were no declarations of interest.

## **52. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 9 MARCH 2018**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **53. ACTION LOG**

The Action Log was noted.

## **54. SCHOOLS FORUM INITIATIVE FOR FAIR FUNDING OF CHILDREN'S EDUCATION**

The Chairman thanked the members of the working group on fair funding for education in Cambridgeshire for their work on this issue and the Vice Chairman for distilling the key points into a single, succinct document. This was a significant piece of work and he expressed gratitude to all involved.

The Vice Chairman stated that there was a consensus amongst Forum members that, following the introduction of the new National Funding Formula (NFF), all areas of education in Cambridgeshire were continuing to experience significant financial pressure. To address this a working group had been formed to try to establish an agreed collective position on key issues such as early years, high needs and basic

entitlement which could be shared with key decision makers and influencers within central government in time to inform planning for the next Budget setting round. To achieve this action was necessary before the summer Parliamentary recess. The working group had reached a reasonable consensus that this work should focus on a small number of key issues and recognise that whilst a major restructuring of the NFF was not on the Government's agenda, some constructive refinements might be considered. It was proposed to write to the Secretary of State for Education and all Cambridgeshire Members of Parliament setting out the particular challenges the county faced and proposing both immediate and medium term actions to begin to address these. As well as considering the content of the letter it would be important to agree the method and timing of communicating the Forum's views with wider partners and stakeholders including Cambridgeshire County Council, teachers, parents and the F40 Group.

The Chairman stated that two announcements had been made in recent days which were relevant to the discussion and invited the Academy Special Schools representative and the Chairman of Cambridgeshire Secondary Heads Group to brief members on these. The Academy Special School representative stated that the Education Select Committee had announced an Inquiry into support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The Terms of Reference included 'the level and distribution of funding for SEND provision'. They felt it was imperative that the Schools Forum should respond to the call for evidence. The closing date for written submissions was 14 June 2018 and they would support a working group to pull together a response. The Maintained Nursery School representative asked that the response should include information relating to SEN in early years children. The Chairman of the Cambridgeshire Secondary Heads Group and Academy representative stated that the Education Select Committee had also announced an Inquiry to inform the Department for Education's bid for funding for schools and colleges, and to consider whether a longer-term vision needed to be taken of education funding in England. With the Chairman's permission, a copy of a news report about the Inquiry was tabled for members' information (copy at Appendix 1). The closing date for written submissions was 30 May 2018 which meant that the Committee's findings should be published before the next Budget round. Given the short time available to produce a response to the two Inquiries the Chairman invited the existing working group to work up a collective response. He invited the Chairman of Cambridgeshire Secondary Heads Group and the Academy Special Schools representative to join the working group to take this work forward. All constituent groups were also encouraged to respond direct to the two Inquiries.

The following points were raised in discussion of the report or in response to questions from members and observers:

- A Maintained Schools member noted that Cambridgeshire was disadvantaged by the October census date because of the high number of new and growing communities within the county. Officers acknowledged this concern, but advised that any change to the October date would have knock-on implications for the timing of the allocation of the dedicated schools grant (DSG) and statutory deadline to issue school budgets and so was unlikely to be considered;
- The Service Director for Education suggested that removing the apprenticeship levy from schools would be one way to put money back into school budgets. It did not represent good value for money as all schools were required to contribute to the training pot, but few were able to utilise it. It was understood that similar concerns had been expressed by Further and Higher Education providers;

- An Early Years representative suggested that the Early Years section of the appendix to the draft letter should include more information about special educational needs (SEN) within this cohort. The Head of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities stated that she had quantifiable data which could be added to illustrate this. The Vice Chairman suggested that a few graphs or tables illustrating key points might helpfully be added to the back of the table, but saw merit in keeping the table setting out the main challenges and possible solutions facing the Schools Block, High Needs Block and Early Years to a single page;  
(**Action:** Head of SEND Services)
- A Schools member questioned whether the third bullet point in the draft letter which read 'to increase the lump sum in the NFF for small schools from 2019/20 so they remain viable' should be amended to refer to all schools. In discussion, it was noted that small schools were the real losers at present and that increasing the lump sum for them would have the biggest impact and would be the cheapest to deliver. An Observer suggested that this reference might be nuanced by proposing a graduated lump sum in inverse proportion to the size of the school. An Academy member commented that they could not agree to a sliding scale lump sum without reference to other Academy providers as this could take money out of some schools' budgets;
- The Chairman agreed that it would be helpful to produce a set of short case studies highlighting the impact of funding pressures in real terms. This should include one case study from nursery, primary, secondary and special schools;  
(**Action:** Vice Chairman/ Working Group)
- A Schools member questioned whether a suggestion should be made that increases should be channelled through the Age Weighted Pupil Units (AWPU) and lump sum on the basis that the basic level of funding was just not enough. Officers noted that this issue was not specific to Cambridgeshire and advised that the Department for Education was more likely to put generic uplifts into the funding formula;
- A Schools representative commented that there must be additional funding overall, not just topping up shortfalls across funding blocks;
- The Academy Special Schools member commented that they would like to see an additional bullet point added to the draft letter regarding the High Needs Block, perhaps regarding the growth in numbers. This should state that there needed to be an overall increase in High Needs funding to fully fund SEN provision for all children who needed it. This should not be done at the expense of the wider cohort through the annual top-ups of the High Needs block which the Forum had felt compelled to make in recent years. The growth strategy identified the potential numbers involved and this needed to be recognised in funding. If sufficiency of places was not managed the long-term financial implications were severe, including an increasing reliance on costly out of county provision. The Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Services offered to provide a table showing predicted pressures which could be included on the reverse page of the appendix.  
(**Action:** Head of SEND Services)

The Chairman of the Children and Young People Committee stated that High Needs funding was an area of great concern to county councillors. He

emphasised the importance of the how this message was portrayed and the need to avoid to make it clear and easily understood. The Service Director for Education stated that the High Needs Funding Formula was predicated on proxy measures and that the response to the Select Committee would be a better vehicle for a detailed response. It would be important for officers to provide advice on the technical aspects to inform that response. The proposed letter to the Secretary of State for Education was a pragmatic approach based on the recognition that the DfE might adjust the National Funding Formula, but it would not be making fundamental changes to it in the short term.

The Chairman noted that the text of the draft letter already made clear the pressure on the High Needs Block in Cambridgeshire and that further detailed observations could be included in the Forum's evidence to the Select Committee Inquiry into support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). He judged that limiting the number of specific requests made in the letter to the Secretary of State for Education made it more likely that these might be achieved.

- An Observer suggested that representations needed to be logical, analytical and persuasive rather than emotive. They noted that some terminology in the first column of the appendix needed revising, for example 'block grant' and 'lump sum' were not the same. They further commented that there was a wider philosophical issue on what central Government wanted education to deliver;
- A Schools member commented that they would want to see more money for all schools nationally, but also for a bigger proportion of that money to go to Cambridgeshire to address the county's historic underfunding. They felt strongly that other local authorities got more funding per pupil and that the bullet points in the draft letter should address specific funding issues being faced by Cambridgeshire's schools otherwise the county's position would not be improved relative to other local authorities. The Vice Chairman commented that an evidence base would be needed to support the argument that Cambridgeshire should receive more money than other local authorities. This had not yet been produced. The Service Director for Education commented that the aim was to ensure that there was enough money to enable all schools to deliver a good quality education to pupils. If total funding was increased to deliver this aim the county's relative position would be irrelevant;
- An Observer commented that they saw a valuable role for the Schools Forum and Local Authority going forward in tailoring the margins of the formula to fit the local landscape;
- The Chairman stated that a clear communications strategy was needed to share details of the Forum's initiative with key local stakeholders including teachers, parents, unions and the County Council and to seek their support. It would also be helpful to produce clear branding for future official communication by the Schools Forum. He welcomed officers' offer of assistance with this.  
(**Action:** Communications and Marketing Manager)

Summing up, the Chairman asked all members, observers and officers to send the Vice Chairman any last comments on the proposed draft letter and appendix by Friday 27 April 2018. The final version would then be circulated to all members for information. All of the key decision makers and influencers receiving the Forum's letter should be invited to attend the Forum's next meeting on 6 July 2018. This would include the

Secretary of State for Education, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, all Members of Parliament with Cambridgeshire constituencies, the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and the Permanent Secretary and Director General for Infrastructure and Funding (School Improvement) at the Department for Education. A copy of the final letter and appendix would be sent to the F40 Group for information.

**(Action:** Communications and Marketing Manager)

It was resolved unanimously by those present that:

- a) the draft letter and appendix attached to the report be amended by the Vice Chairman to reflect discussion at the meeting and any further comments received by 27 April 2018;
- b) the Chairman write to key decision makers and influencers setting out the views of the Schools Forum and inviting them to attend the Forum's next meeting on 6 July 2018.

## **55. AGENDA PLAN**

The Agenda Plan was noted.

## **56. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Forum is due to meet next on Friday 6 July 2018 at 10.00am in the Kreis Viersen Room, Shire Hall, Cambridge.

Chairman  
(date)