

Cambridgeshire Schools Forum - Minutes

Date: Friday 12 January 2024

Time: 10.00am – 11.02am

Venue: Via zoom

Present:

Maintained Primary - Nicki Brown, Sasha Howard and Cate Thompson

Maintained Special Schools - Joanne Hardwick

Maintained Nursery - Karen Scott

Hospital Education - Nadine Gooding-Hebert

Early Years Reference Group - Kate Spencer Allen

Trade Unions – Shelagh Kavanagh

Academy Sector Appointments - Susannah Connell, Simon Bainbridge, Jon Culpin (Chair), Richard Spencer (Vice Chair), Adrian Ball, Christopher Bennett, Ryan Kelsall, Richard Scott, Peter Law, Mark Vickers, Carin Taylor, and Lesley Birch

Cambridgeshire County Council - Councillors Michael Atkins, Claire Daunton (virtual), and Simone Taylor (virtual)

Officers - Jonathan Lewis: Service Director Education, Martin Wade: Strategic Finance Officer and Tamar Oviatt-Ham: Democratic Services Officer.

63. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Lesley Birch, Sasha Howard, Carin Taylor and Helen Brooke (sub Shelagh Kavanagh)

64. Schools Forum Minutes - 13 December 2023 and Action Log

It was resolved unanimously:

to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2023 as a correct record and note the action log.

65. Schools Budget Setting 2024-25

The Schools Forum received a [presentation](#) that provided information to support the 2024-25 Schools budget setting process and covered the following areas:

- National Funding Announcements
- Final Schools Budget Proposals
- High Needs Block
- Central Schools Services Block
- Next Steps

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the presentation;

- Queried what changes would be made to the Safety Valve in light of the current position. The Service Director: Education explained that officers were currently recasting future demand and forecasts and looking to understand the size of the gap in future years. He explained that they were looking at the appropriate actions to take as well as reducing costs. He stated that autism diagnoses were not growing as expected but that SEN was growing exponentially, and officers were looking at the implications of this and any changes would be reported by the end of the financial year and reported back to the forum.
- Stated it was crucial to allow enough time for discussion of the banding to ensure that it was fit for purpose and that it should be discussed at special school heads meetings. Officers explained that work had already started on this and that it would be fed through the relevant meetings and that there had been a discussion about carrying out dual running for the first part of the year.
- Questioned who would have oversight of the safety valve work due to the imminent departure of the current Service Director: Education. The Service Director: Education explained that there would be interim support whilst the post was being recruited to and that the forum would be updated on arrangements.
- Highlighted that the SEND funding situation remained critical and that the forum and authority should continue to lobby government on the issue. The Service Director: Education agreed to take this view back to the Children and Young Peoples Committee.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) note and comment on the final schools funding formula proposals following the December announcements.

- b) note and comment on the high needs block following the December announcements.
- c) note and comment on the central schools services block following the December announcements.

66. Early Years Funding Formula 2024-25

The Schools Forum received a report on the proposed approach to funding early years places in 2024-25.

Officers highlighted the following points in relation to the report:

- The funding of early years provision including sustainability and the way the sector is run will be critical and a key focus over the next few years.
- Government required a minimum 95% of funding for each entitlement to be passed to providers through the base rate and supplements. The intention was to increase this to 97% in around 2 years' time.
- Officers had been working with the early years funding group on rates and they had concluded that they wanted early rates and for this to be pushed out quickly so that settings could establish what staffing they would need and how they might meet demand. The issue was sustainability across a large network.
- The increased proposed retention in Cambridgeshire was a low rate compared to other local authorities.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the report;

- Reiterated the need to have early rates so that providers could be organised and get ready for the changes coming in.
- Stated that the rate being retained was good compared to the authorities' statistical neighbours but queried if the authority was confident with the proposals. The Service Director: Education stated that the authority would keep the rates under constant review and would come back with any further requests if needed. He explained that the authority was mindful of the need to pass on 97% of the funding in two years' time and that there was some other government funding coming in which would be a one off. He explained that there was a need for increased training of the workforce to support settings to grow.
- Highlighted that some settings were required to be federated and queried if funding would be going straight to these settings, and that it

was crucial to have trained staff. The Service Director: Education explained that were nursery schools were federated this would continue as the purpose of federations was to share resources and the funding was an opportunity to grow what nursery schools do. Officers also explained there was still increasing challenges in relation to recruitment and that the quality improvement team were working with schools to ensure that staff were effectively trained.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) comment on the proposed approach to funding early years places in 2024-25;
- b) and approve the centrally retained budget elements totalling £1,585,000 set out in table 1.

67. Union Facilities Time

The Schools Forum considered a report on the Cambridgeshire Trade Union Facilities agreement and a proposed review to be undertaken and brought to Schools Forum in the Autumn 2024.

Officers highlighted the following points in relation to the report:

- The agreement had been in place for many years and had worked effectively.
- A buy back scheme for union facilities time was in place and Maintained schools were topsliced via the de-delegation mechanism and academies were billed directly based upon a standard charge, currently £1.10 per pupil.
- Whilst the facilities agreement was updated annually, the underlying principles had not been changed in many years. There had been some updating of rates including increasing the daily rate agreed in the arrangement from £205 to £215.50 but this needed formal review in light of the cost of supply and other costs for the host school.
- It was proposed that a more thorough review was undertaken of the facilities agreement including consultation with schools.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the report;

- Highlighted the need to ensure that the review was discussed at the relevant Headteacher forums and Joint Union Group ahead of discussion and agreement at Schools Forum. The Service Director: Education explained that he had already scheduled the report into the relevant meeting agendas.

- Queried the ratios of representation across the workforce to ensure that future facilities arrangements were proportionate. The Service Director: Education explained that the current model was around fixed costs so more information needed to be gathered to review how this might work in terms of future arrangements. He explained that the overall affordability had to be considered.

It was resolved unanimously to:

discuss the Cambridgeshire Trade Union Facilities agreement and agree that a review is undertaken and brought to Schools Forum in the Autumn 2024 to consider the operation of the agreement.

68. Proposed Future Schools Forum Dates 2024-25

The Schools Forum received a report that outlined the proposed future Schools Forum Dates for 2024-25.

A member highlighted that the meeting scheduled for 1 November 2024 was during half terms so this would need to be amended. **Action Required.**

It was resolved unanimously to:

Approve the dates for future forum meetings as set out section 3 of the report.

69. Agenda Plan

The agenda plan was noted.

Bringing the meeting to a close the Chair explained that it was the last Schools Forum meeting for the Service Director: Education. He thanked him for his contribution to the forum with 25 meetings of Forum since he started in the role in 2018. He thanked him for his service leading education in Cambridgeshire and his dedication to all schools.