

Cambridgeshire Schools Forum - Minutes

Date: Friday 14 July 2023

Time: 10:00am – 10:50am

Venue: Virtual via zoom

Present:

Academy Primary - Susannah Connell

Maintained Nursery - Alex Pearson

Maintained Primary - Nicki Brown, Sasha Howard and Guy Underwood

Maintained Special Schools - Joanne Hardwick

Trade Unions - Jon Duveen

Diocese of Ely Church Schools - Andrew Read

Our Lady of Walsingham Catholic Trust – Clare Clarke

Academy Sector Appointments - Christopher Bennet, Lesley Birch, Jon Culpin (Chair), Duncan Ramsey, Richard Spencer, Carin Taylor and Mark Vickers.

Cambridgeshire County Council - Councillors Michael Atkins, Claire Daunton, and Simone Taylor.

Officers - Jonathan Lewis: Service Director Education, Tamar Oviatt-Ham: Democratic Services Officer and Rob Reynolds - National Management Graduate

43. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from John King, Paul Stratford, Cllr Bryony Goodliffe (sub-Councillor Michael Atkins), Nadine Gooding-Hébert, Simon Bainbridge, and Adrian Ball.

There were no declarations of interest.

44. Schools Forum Minutes - 13 January 2023

It was resolved:

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January as a correct record.

45. Review of Membership and Proportionality 2023-24

The Schools Forum was asked to review proportionality on the forum in relation to the latest data from the January 2023 census; which assessed whether any further changes were required to seating allocation on the forum; and to review the current vacancies and appointments identified for re-election. Following an evaluation of proportionality, it had been concluded that no changes were required. However, some appointments were eligible for re-election and were outlined in the report.

It was resolved to:

Note and comment on the report.

46. Schools Balances and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Financial Health - 2022-23

The Schools Forum received a report on Schools Balances and DSG Financial Health.

Introducing the report, the Service Director: Education highlighted the following points:

- Noted that announcements on future funding had just been made the previous day and highlighted that the report therefore contained some out-of-date data.
- Highlighted that there has been a decline in maintained schools balances. Section 2.1 of the report demonstrated the reduction. The reduction and decline tied into challenges around pay awards, inflation, and other budget difficulties.
- Expressed concern around several schools in the maintained sector with budget deficits. These schools could be separated into two categories one, where schools were adjusting to new funding arrangements and two, long term challenges with budgets. Section 2.5 of the report outlined that four schools now had over £100,000 in deficits. Officers were working with these schools and would be issuing financial notices of concern; this was to outline the support they needed and what may need to change. Deficit issues were also

coupled with other challenges such as lower numbers of children coming into primary schools, and higher numbers going into secondary. It was outlined that this was a particular issue in smaller schools and a piece of work around providing support was being initiated.

- Noted the potential for using the balance control mechanism for maintained schools, which was a tool that could be implemented with Schools Forum agreement. The tool would allow the authority to manage the level of surplus balance within maintained schools. It had not been used in Cambridgeshire for many years. The Service Director Education stated that he would consult with maintained schools and bring this back to forum in the autumn.
- Drew attention to the audit work that has been ongoing. Appendix B of the reported included the academy balances. There had been an increase in surplus balances from £31m to £34m for those schools that could be compared like for like. Officers were unable to identify individual school budgets for schools with pooled budgets.
- Explained that section 8.0 of the report highlighted the year end position with the DSG, with a net deficit of £29.1m, which included the high needs block. The table also highlighted that the first payment of the safety valve funding from central government had been received. The council had also made the first instalment of its contribution. As a result, the authority was on track against the Department for Education (DfE) safety valve repayment at the end of the last financial year and update would be provided to forum in the autumn.
- Highlighted the ongoing work in relation to growth funds and noted that it had been a particularly difficult year for secondary admissions where the number of children taking up places was significantly higher than in previous years due to the challenges around the cost of living. Officers continued to work with a number of schools to finalise growth fund allocations and would report back to forum at a future date.

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

- Asked when the next payment from Government for the Safety Valve would be. The Service Director: Education stated that the first payment was received in March 2023 and the next was due in March 2024.
- Requested an update on the SEND Leadership Panel. The Service Director: Education stated that that a new governance arrangement had been established. He explained that there had been a split of education services between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and some of the meetings that had previously been joint had now been split. The Cambridgeshire SEND Executive Board had been established and would consider the local areas response to the challenges of SEND. He explained that the board would also review

the safety valve, demand, and response. He stated that the membership had been updated to be at a more strategic level than it had previously been. The intention was that there would be an interaction between schools forum and the executive board to consider performance against the safety valve but also around how government policy would influence schools and their funding arrangements. He stated that an update report on the Board would be brought to the autumn meeting.

- Stated that considering Governments announcement the previous day, officers may need to bring the budget process forward from November/December time. Officers were waiting to hear what the DSG announcement might look like and were starting to model some of the changes and implications.
- Queried in light of the safety valve funding, whether there would still be a transfer of high needs block funding. The Service Director: Education responded that the safety valve agreement assumed a 1% transfer for each of the next three financial years, and that this had already been shared with the forum. He stated that a vote on the transfer was still required on an annually.

It was resolved to:

Note and comment on the contents of the report.

47. Early Years and Childcare Entitlement Changes 2023-25

The Schools Forum considered a report that gave an overview of the changes to early years and childcare entitlement as outlined in the Spring Budget 2023 and the changes in consultation requirements for September 2023 early years hourly uplift.

Introducing the report, the Service Director: Education highlighted the following points:

- The Government, in its spring budget, had announced significant changes to childcare provision. The authority had started to receive information from government on the changes including, how they would be implemented, and the funding that would be available.
- Explained that there would be a role for school's forum going forwards, particularly in terms of setting hourly rates coming into next financial year.
- Drew attention to section 1.2 of the report as, from September 2025, children aged 9 month and upward would be entitled to free childcare. This was a significant expansion of the sector and would have significant financial consequences.

- Explained that there was an estimate in section 3 of the report around the amounts of new places that would be required.
- Highlighted that there was an expectation that every primary school would offer 8am till 6pm wrap around care. He stated that there was no revenue funding to support the increased childcare, but that there would potentially be some capital funding available to facilitate this.
- Explained that the local authority would work with schools and the sector to plan for how best to deliver the wrap around care. One of the immediate implications was that the Government had announced an uplift in funding for the early years sector and some information had been shared with schools today. He explained that he had written to all PVI settings around that change. A significant increase in two-year-old funding had also been made available, with a top-up/slight increase to three- and four-year-old funding. He explained that he was happy to share that information if attendees had not seen it. He explained that the forum would need to decide how that funding was allocated. He explained it was a ring-fence-grant and will be funded up until the 31 of March 2024 and then it will be mainstreamed as part of the overall early years funding block from the next financial year.

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

- Asked about the possibility of additional funding for any capital implications. The Service Director: Education explained that the only figures available were outlined in the report and it was not clear what funding the local authority would receive, and what the mechanism would be to allocate the funding. He explained that Cambridgeshire was one of the local authorities that had been selected to work with the DfE on the pilot for wrap-around provision. The Service Director: Education explained that the authority would be part of the group that helped shape the policy, oversight, expectations, and the delivery for the provision and the forum would be kept up to date on the authority's engagement with the pilot and progress made. He hoped this would give the authority an early insight into the future arrangements and stated that the new requirements would be built into future service planning and into the Council Business Planning process.
- Highlighted that pay was a significant issue and lack of ability to compete in the labour market should be included in early-stage discussions. The Service Director: Education concurred with this point and stated that these issues had been raised with the DfE.
- Asked about the increase in two-year-old funding, as whilst it was an uplift, it did not cover the average current charges, and as a result, for maintained nursey schools this would still be a big challenge. It was acknowledged that maintained nurseries were unable to charge top up on free entitlement. The Service Director: Education stated that

maintained nurseries had not been included in the announcement regarding teachers' pay.

- Drew attention to section 4.2 of the report which outlined how progress would be monitored through the Children and Young Peoples Committee and noted that the views of Schools Forum would be included in reports going to Committee.

It was resolved to:

Note and comment on changes to early years and childcare entitlement as outlined in the Spring Budget 2023.

Note changes in consultation requirements for September 2023 early years hourly uplift.

48. Schools Forum Agenda Plan - July 2023

It was resolved to:

Note the agenda plan.

49. Any other Business

No other items of business were raised.

Chair