

CAMBRIDGESHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM: MINUTES

Date: Friday 7 July 2017

Time: 10.00am – 11.45am

Place: Kreis Viersen Room, Shire Hall, Cambridge

Present:

Members

P Hodgson (Chairman), Dr A Rodger (Vice Chairman), L Calow, S Connell, T Davies, J Digby, D Parfitt, A Reeder and S Tinsley.

Observers

Nick Hills Church of England Diocese of Ely Board of Education
(substituting for A Read)

G Fewtrell Teachers' Union

Councillor P Downes Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC)

Councillor S Bywater Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC)

Officers

K Grimwade – Director for Learning (CCC), J Lee – Head of Integrated Finance Services (LGSS), M Teasdale – Director of Strategy and Commissioning, M Wade – Strategic Finance Manager (CCC) and D Snowdon (Clerk - CCC)

Apologies:

Forum Members: K Coates, A Goulding, J North, Dr K Taylor

Observers: S Conant

Officers: Dr H Phelan, Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Services

1. ELECTION OF THE CHAIRMAN/CHAIRWOMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN/WOMAN

It was proposed by Dr Alan Rodger, seconded by Stuart Tinsley proposed that Philip Hodgson be elected as Chairman of the Schools Forum for 2017/18. On being put to the vote the Forum resolved unanimously to appoint Philip Hodgson as Chairman.

The newly appointed Chairman, Philip Hodgson proposed, seconded by Lucie Calow that Dr Alan Rodger be elected as Vice Chairman of the Schools Forum 2017/18. On being put to the vote it was resolved unanimously to appoint Dr Alan Rodger as Vice-Chairman.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were noted as recorded above. The Chairman drew members' attention to declarations of interest within the Forum's constitution. There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 17 MARCH 2017 AND ACTION LOG

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Action Log was noted.

4. MAINTAINED SCHOOLS AND DSG FINANCIAL HEALTH

The Forum received a report that provided analysis of the 2016/17 final closing balance position of maintained schools and the overall Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) as at 31st March 2017. Officers drew attention to the high proportion of schools that were showing balances which was deemed to be healthy. Where balances were assessed to be excessive then the Council would investigate further with the individual schools to determine the reason for the accrual.

Officers also highlighted that all centrally retained DSG balances had been applied during 2016/17 and a small deficit carried forward into 2017/18.

Members of the Forum noted that a report updating members on pressures within High Needs Block would be presented later in the year.

During the course of discussion members:

- Questioned whether there was an indication of what the budget deficit position would likely be in the future. Members were informed that Maintained Schools would likely move into deficit if they did not make changes to their budget plans. Officers explained that work was being undertaken to fully understand the varying budgetary positions of schools.
- Confirmed that approximately three schools had deficit licenses.
- Questioned whether Academy Schools were experiencing the same levels of deficit that maintained schools were. The Forum noted that the balance sheets of Academy Schools were distorted due to the capital assets that sat within them. No Academy Trust could enter deficit without licence and many possessed dwindling reserves. Staffing costs were being investigated and assessed in order to meet budgetary concerns.
- Noted that all financial information for Academy Trusts such as annual accounts was available on the internet for public inspection. The Forum was reminded that Academy Trusts were responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of school buildings that maintained schools were not.
- Expressed concern regarding the number of schools that were entering deficit.

It was resolved to:

Note to the contents of the report and the proposed approach to managing the brought forward deficit on DSG budgets.

5. CAMBRIDGESHIRE 2018/19 FUNDING FORMULA

The Forum received a report that provided an update regarding the Cambridgeshire 2018/19 Funding Formula and sought the views of the Forum on the next steps for preparing for 2018/19. Attention was drawn to paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 of the officer report along with the Governments' plans to stop free lunches for all infants being dropped; the money saved would have been incorporated in the new funding formula.

During discussion members:

- Highlighted the table at paragraph 3.2 of the officer report, noting the difficulties smaller primary schools faced. Expressed frustration with Department for Education (DfE) spokesmen that insisted the government was protecting schools funding in real terms. A member of the Academy Secondary Heads highlighted a pre-general election publicity campaign that sought to address misinformation regarding schools funding. Work was ongoing to draw it to the attention of government ministers.
- Requested that the current funding formula was not changed as doing so could adversely affect protection for schools once the new funding formula was released.
- Emphasised the need for stability to be created within the funding formula.
- Agreed for a letter to be sent to local MPs that highlighted concern regarding the funding formula. **ACTION**

It was resolved:

- a) To continue largely as is with the existing formula.
- b) When the Department for Education publishes their response an additional Schools Forum meeting be called in order to assess the position for Cambridgeshire schools and the local formula for 2018/19 ahead of the October 2017 meeting.

6. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK

The Forum received a report that set out the current position regarding High Needs Block. Officers highlighted that there would be no additional funding for the High Needs Block and when compared to the 2016/17 baseline, the illustrative data showed that Cambridgeshire would receive over £3.4m of protection for the allocation to be brought up to the 0% funding floor.

The Forum's attention was drawn to the funding commitments set out in paragraph 2.3 of the officer report and the forecast overspend in SEN Placements.

During the course of discussion members:

- Emphasised the continuing difficulties regarding funding for under 2 year old children. Work was taking place officers informed members that sought to address how funding flowed between sectors which would assist.
- Noted the wider impact upon reception pupils due to children having not been tested prior to starting school and the response to the Tier 2 consultation.
- Expressed concern regarding the changes made to health care services that would have a severely detrimental effect on the budgetary position of SEN schools.
- Clarified the overall budgetary position of the High Needs Block, questioning whether there was a point at which the position would become unsustainable. It was confirmed that it was necessary for the budget to stand by itself and therefore as a result could fall over.
- Expressed concern at the level of funding for under 2 year olds as it was counter-productive when prevention was such a high priority for agencies.
- Noted that the 3 new special schools planned for Cambridgeshire would address some of the demographic pressures facing the county, but would not attract additional government funding.
- Noted that the NHS had not commissioned additional staff to cover the additional schools therefore resources would be stretched further and would negatively impact existing SEN schools.
- Expressed concern regarding funding and requested that officials within the Department for Education be briefed on the issues faced by SEN schools and that the issues and concerns be addressed in the letter to be sent to local MPs regarding the funding formula. **ACTION**

It was resolved to:

Note the approach set out in the report.

7. CENTRAL SCHOOL SERVICES BLOCK EDUCATION SERVICES GRANT

The Forum received a report from the Strategic Finance Business Partner that provided further information in respect of the proposed mechanism for the central services block, alongside current functions and services funded by both this block and the Education Services Grant (ESG) replacement methodology.

During discussion of the report:

- Attention was drawn to the historical commitments and the recycling of money as the requirement of their funding ceased. The savings requirements made of the Council were emphasised to the forum and the importance of the wider context when allocating funding.

- Noted the review of traded services due to take place in the autumn and increased efficiency through greater partnership working with Peterborough City Council. A post for Senior Admissions Manager would cover both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to produce a more effective service.
- Thanked officers for Appendix A of the report which was helpful and requested that in future statutory requirements within Appendix A be highlighted. **ACTION**
- Noted that the historical commitments could not be increased and the Department for Education expected them to reduce in time but it was not possible to provide assurance regarding timescales.
- Welcomed the outcome of the SEN Ofsted review and questioned whether value for money was being achieved regarding occupational therapy over and above what the NHS provided. It was explained that there was a statutory duty to provide some occupational health services and further details could be provided outside of the meeting.
- Requested that details of services which would be impacted by any reduction in centrally retained funding be reported back to the next meeting of Forum to support the decision making process for 2018/19 budgets. **ACTION**

It was resolved to:

Note the approach set out in the report.

8. CAMBRIDGESHIRE PUBLIC SERVICES NETWORK (CPSN)

The Forum received a report that requested that the CPSN that had been in place since 2004 for all bar 2 schools be extended until 31 December 2019. This would allow time for the complex procurement project to take place and for Health partners to be ready to join the partnership.

A member of the Forum noted the approach set out in the report and highlighted that Academy Schools would have to join the partnership in the same way as Health partners. Officers confirmed that discussions were taking place with Academy Schools regarding the CPSN.

It was resolved to:

To agree to the continuation of funding for CPSN through to the end of the contract extension, 31 December 2019 at a cost of £1.459m.

9. AGENDA PLAN

The Schools Forum received the forward agenda plan.

It was resolved to:

Note the Schools Forum Forward Agenda Plan.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Forum will meet next on Friday 6 October at 10.00am in the Kreis Viersen Room, Shire Hall, Cambridge CB3 0AP. – To be amended to reflect expected DfE announcements.

Chairman
3 November 2017