

Cambridgeshire Schools Forum - Minutes

Date: Wednesday 13 December 2023

Time: 10.00am – 11.30am

Venue: Via zoom

Present:

Maintained Primary - Nicki Brown and Sasha Howard

Maintained Special Schools - Joanne Hardwick

Maintained Nursery - Karen Scott

Hospital Education - Nadine Gooding-Hebert

Early Years Reference Group - Kate Spencer Allen

Trade Unions - Helen Brook

Diocese of Ely - Sarah Conant

Academy Sector Appointments - Susannah Connell, Jon Culpin (Chair), Richard Spencer (Vice Chair), Adrian Ball, Christopher Bennett, Ryan Kelsall, Richard Scott, Peter Law, Mark Vickers, Karin Taylor, Duncan Ramsey 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.

58. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies received from Clare Clarke

Jon Culpin, Suzanne Connell, Richard Scott, Adrian Ball, Lesley Birch, Christopher Bennett and Richard Spencer declared an interest in item 3 as their trusts had schools that received growth funding.

59. Schools Forum Minutes – 3 November 2023

It was resolved unanimously:

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

60. Schools Budget Setting 2024-25 - December 2023

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

- 2024-25 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Funding Arrangements
- Retained Funding and De-Delegations (Maintained Primary only)
- Pupil Numbers – Appendix 2 provides a comparison of pupil numbers between the October 2022 and October 2023 census points.
- Growth and Falling Rolls Funding - Appendix 3 is the draft Growth Fund policy to be applied in 2024-25, and Appendix 4 provides analysis of the proposed funding route for growth.
- Next Steps

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the 2024/25 DSG Funding Arrangements – Autumn Statement and the Retained Funding and De-Delegations:

- queried if there would be investment into a new admissions system for schools and if this was included in the de-delegation. Officers explained that the authority was currently going through a tender process for a new admissions system which would be funded through the retained schools budget.
- highlighted that the volume of casework for the unions had risen year on year and that there had been no increase on the price per pupil to reflect this. Officers stated that there had been conversations with the unions as part of the review of the facilities agreement and that any changes would impact the maintained schools and any academies that bought into the agreement. Officers explained that a report looking at the demands and pressures on the facilities agreement and a forward look at the potential for any changes in future years would be brought to the next meeting of forum. **ACTION**

Individual members raised the following points in relation to pupil numbers, Growth Funding / Falling Rolls / New Schools and the Exceptional Premises Factor:

- asked if the authority had further data on the projected number of special schools. Officers explained that they were working with place planning colleagues on that data for this to feed into the safety valve work and explained that there was no growth funding for special schools as this was covered by the safety valve funding.
- queried how the growth and falling rolls funding was derived. Officers explained that they were based on the unvalidated October census data and on demographic projections across the area, total number of pupils, housing developments and an estimate of future demand, which

all formed part of the local plan of the authority, with similar work produced for early years settings, and highlighted that this was not an easy calculation. Officers stated that the data did not take into consideration parental preference. Officers had contacted the ESFA to ask them whether there was scope to consider the use of more local data and were speaking to other local authorities to see if the SCAP 23 data was also causing them similar issues.

- suggested that in section 1.3 of the revised growth funding policy, it was highlighted that this did not cover post 16 education, for the sake of clarity. **ACTION**

It was resolved unanimously to:

a) approve (Maintained Primary representatives only):

- i. The continued retention of £10 per pupil from maintained schools for services specifically provided to maintained schools.
- ii. The continuation of the de-delegation in respect of Contingency.
- iii. The continuation of the de-delegation in respect of Free School Meals Eligibility.
- iv. The continuation of the de-delegation in respect of Maternity and Paternity Cover.
- v. The continuation of the de-delegation in respect of Trade Union Facilities Time.

b) comment on the proposed approach for Growth and Falling rolls funding.

c) approve the proposed Growth Funding policy (Appendix 3) and the retained Growth Fund budget of £2m to apply to 2024/25 only.

d) note the proposed variations to pupil numbers.

e) vote on the continuation of the historic exceptional premises factor arrangements.

61. SEND Update

The Schools Forum received a [presentation](#) that gave an update on Special Educational Needs in Cambridgeshire (SEND)

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

- queried if the Department for Education had recognised the impact the delay in their projects had on the safety valve model. Officers clarified

that they had been part of the conversations with the authority to revise the model going forwards.

- questioned if officers had considered writing to parents and carers whose children had been affected by the delays in providing special school places. Officers explained that they had written to parents and carers whose children attended mainstream schools to update them on progress to date. Officers stated that more special school places had been created but demand had increased even further, and this needed to be considered against the delay in building the school at Gamlingay. Officers agreed that they would also write to maintained school staff with an update. **ACTION**
- sought assurances that needs would be met through the banding process. Officers explained that the banding process defined the types of provision required and this would be overlayed with a costing model and that the challenge would be to best fit funding against the cost and would be an iterative model but would be fair and more consistent.
- asked if there was a timetable for the completion of the school in Gamlingay and the Samuel Pepys School. Officers stated that they would update the forum on timelines but that the Samuel Pepys School was due to open in November 2024. **ACTION** Officers stated that they welcomed the support that schools had been giving whilst waiting for the special schools to open.
- highlighted that some schools were disproportionately picking up EHCPs out of catchment and encouraged more honest and robust challenge in this as it would become unsustainable for some schools. Officers explained that they had already spoken to Primary Heads about this and would pick up with Secondary Heads as it was causing issues.
- queried what work had been done to manage parents/carers expectations with what schools could provide and support. Officers explained that this would be included in the SEND and AP improvement planning around managing choice and setting expectations.
- discussed creating a more joined up process between primary and secondary and queried what the nature of the conversation with OFSTED in relation to the county's current position in relation to SEND and special school places. Officers stated that there was a good dialogue with OFSTED and officers had shared the pressures with them. Officers had taken part in an annual contact meeting with other inspectors and were doing all they could to represent the position.
- queried whether the safety valve model was deliverable given the increase in costs and demand and the current issues identified with the

model as it stood. Officers explained that they were testing deliverability now in relation to 2026-27 and the reforms coming through the national improvement plan. Officers stated there was no clear picture on future funding and that the chancellors announcement in March 2024 might give some respite and would outline the implications of resetting the model at the March meeting of forum.

ACTION

note and comment on the position around the high needs block and safety valve position in light of the ongoing challenges of SEND demand.

62. Agenda Plan

Officers outlined that there would be reports on the following at the January meeting of forum:

- Early years funding
- Special schools funding
- Paper on Unions Facilities time

A member queried the date of the reserve meeting in February as it was half term. Officers to review. **ACTION**

The Chair thanked Duncan Ramsey for his service on the forum as it was his last meeting before stepping down.

The agenda plan was noted.