

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM: MINUTES**

**Date:** Friday 6 July 2018

**Time:** 10.05am – 12.00pm

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

**Present:** P Hodgson (Chairman), Dr A Rodger (Vice Chairman), L Calow,  
S Connell, T Davies, J Digby, J Lancaster-Adlam, A Matthews, A Reeder,  
S Tinsley and R Waldau

**Observers**

Councillor S Bywater	Cambridgeshire County Council
G Fewtrell	Teachers' Union
Councillor P Downes	Cambridgeshire County Council
Councillor J Whitehead	Cambridgeshire County Council

**Officers**

J Lewis (until 10.55am), J Lee and R Greenhill (Clerk)

**Apologies:**

Forum Members: S Blyth – Maintained Primary  
A Goulding – Academy Secondary  
J North – Maintained Primary  
D Parfitt – Early Years Reference Group  
Dr K Taylor OBE – Academy Special  
M Woods – Academy Secondary

**57. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed the members of the public and press in attendance and stated that they were welcome to film, take pictures, tweet or blog during the meeting.

**58. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**59. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 20 APRIL 2018**

The minutes of the meeting on 20 April 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**60. ACTION LOG**

The action log was reviewed and updates noted. The Clerk would seek further updates on those actions which remained outstanding.

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

The Chairman stated that he proposed to discuss the Schools Forum initiative on fair funding first before moving on to an update from officers on the 2019/20 Dedicated Schools Grant and National Funding Formula.

### Schools Forum Initiative for Fair Funding of Children's Education

The Head of Integrated Finance Services stated that the report provided an update on Working Group activity since the last meeting; a copy of the letter and enclosure sent by the Chairman and Vice Chairman on 14 May 2018 on behalf of the Forum to all Members of Parliament for Cambridgeshire and copied to the Secretary of State for Education; a copy of the response sent on behalf of the Forum to the Education Select Committee's call for evidence on school funding; a copy of Cambridgeshire County Council's response to the same Select Committee Inquiry; and a copy of the response to the Education Select Committee's Inquiry into support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) sent on behalf of the County Council, Cambridgeshire's schools and Early Years Providers and independent support services for parents and carers. At the Chairman's request a copy of the response which he and the Vice Chairman had received from Lucy Frazer QC MP dated 29 June 2018 and containing a further response from Nick Gibb MP, the Minister of State for School Standards, was tabled on the grounds that it had been received too late to be included with the published report, but contained information which was material to the discussion.

The Vice Chairman stated that in addition to Ms Frazer's letter there had been an exchange of emails with Daniel Zeichner MP who was supportive of the Forum's position. He had also had discussions with Heidi Allen MP who was pressing the case within Government. He expressed disappointment at the content of the Minister of State's response which repeated what was already known and did not respond to the specific questions which the Forum had posed. The response to the Select Committee Inquiry into school funding reflected the general consensus of opinion within the Working Group, although some nuances from different members were acknowledged. The response had included the offer to give oral evidence to the Inquiry if required. It was proposed to issue a press release later in the day to share this information more widely. An on-line petition to Government had been submitted and would go live in about a week once approved. It had been written in a fairly generic style with a view to being shared with the f40 Group. Members were asked to cascade the information through schools and to encourage all parents and staff to sign the petition and pass it on as widely as possible amongst family and friends. The Vice Chairman stated that he proposed to respond to the Minister of State's letter and to copy this to the Secretary of State for Education to ensure the Forum's concerns were being heard at the highest levels. The Chairman expressed his thanks to all members of the Working Group for their contributions and in particular to the Vice Chairman for the significant amount of time he had given to collecting views and shaping and honing the various responses.

The following points were raised in discussion of the Schools Forum Initiative for Fair Funding of Children's Education and in response to questions:

- A Maintained Primary member commented that it was harder to get petition signatures than might be expected and suggested it would be better to postpone the proposed press release until the online petition went live so that it could make reference to this;

- An Observer commented that they felt the Forum's comments should include more positive observations about the state of education in Cambridgeshire to provide balance. Improvements had been made in recent years with the majority of schools in the county now rated as either good or outstanding, but these improvements were being put in jeopardy by the pressure on funding. Some specific areas like Fenland faced particular difficulties;
- The Service Director for Education stated that the impact of insufficient funding on children's outcomes was key and that Cambridgeshire's schools were losing out due to Government funding policies, not due to decisions being made at county level;
- A Maintained Primary member suggested postponing the launch of the initiative until September when families and staff would be fresh and focused. The Vice Chairman stated that this would be too late to inform the Treasury's budget planning process which was already beginning. To address this the initiative might be launched now as planned, but with a renewed push given again in September. A copy of the proposed press release would be circulated quickly to Forum members for comment with a view to it being issued early the following week;  
(**Action:** Communications and Marketing Manager)
- An Academy Secondary member stated that headteachers would be marching to Downing Street on 28 September 2018 to deliver a letter to the Prime Minister on school funding;
- The Trade Union Observer highlighted the concerns being expressed amongst union members;
- An Observer questioned the assertion in the Minister of State's letter that the sparsity factor was sufficient to meet the needs of small and rural schools. Officers stated that the Minister was mainly re-stating an explanation of what the Government had done, but they were unsure where the comment that the combined sparsity factor and lump sum of £110,00 being sufficient came from. It was noted that neither special schools nor maintained nursery schools would receive the £110,000 lump sum, contrary to the Minister's comment that this was received 'by every school';
- The Maintained Special School representative stated that the response to the Select Committee Inquiry into support for children and young people with SEND had been circulated in draft for comment and finalised by herself, the Academy Special School representative and the County Council's Head of SEND Services and Principal Educational Psychologist. The response had emphasised the support provided across all school phases and types, not just by special schools. Much excellent work was being done, but the funding available was simply not enough. All of Cambridgeshire's special schools were currently rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, but professionals were looking to deepen the interplay between social care and education. There was also a belief that health needs should be included more fully as this was not yet being seen in many Education, Health and Care Plans.
- The Maintained Special School representative noted that Dr Helen Phelan, the Head of Send Services, would shortly be leaving the Council to take up a new

post. On behalf of all of Cambridgeshire's Special School headteachers she expressed her thanks to Dr Phelan for the impact which she had achieved in a relatively short period in her current post. The sufficiency surveys which she had commissioned and her work in relation to students with particularly complex needs was highlighted for particular praise. There was some collective anxiety amongst Special School professionals about the need to maintain momentum following Dr Phelan's departure given that a number of posts within Specialist Services were currently vacant or held by interim appointees. These comments were seconded by the Academy Alternative Provision representative in relation to Dr Phelan's work for students with social, emotional and mental health needs;

The Service Director for Education stated that he was very mindful of what had been achieved and that he would be in touch regarding future arrangements and would keep schools briefed.

Summing up, the Chairman expressed disappointment at the letter from the Minister of State. He and the Vice Chairman had met with Nick Gibbs MP about three years ago and made an offer of support to schools in other local authorities which had not been taken up. The content of the letter suggested it was a standard response prepared by officials rather than a considered reply by the Minister to the specific issues raised.

#### 2019/20 Dedicated Schools Grant and National Funding Formula

The Head of Integrated Finance Services stated that officers had attended an information session held by the Department for Education (DfE) on 22 June 2018 about the 2019/20 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and National Funding Formula (NFF). At the time of discussion no formal announcement had been made by the DfE therefore it was important to stress that the Government's policy had not yet been confirmed. The announcement was expected sometime in July 2018.

#### Schools Block

The NFF was likely to remain largely unchanged for 2019/20. The funding floor had increased to 1% and it was expected that indicative figures would be released alongside the announcement. The Premises Factor was still under review, but it was understood that it would remain the same for 2019/20. A new approach was expected in relation to the mobility factor, but not until 2020/21. The main change expected was a move to a more formulaic approach to the Growth Fund with a late lagged formula basis based on past pupil growth numbers. This would be significant in Cambridgeshire where some areas experienced high growth. A figure of £65,000 for new schools to support pre-opening costs had also been suggested, although no further detail was known at this stage. More information would be brought to the Forum's next meeting in October 2018.

#### High Needs Block

No information had been provided on the quantum of funding. Special Free Schools would be moved into the High Needs Block so care would be needed to see that the cost burden was not shifted to the local authority. A consultation would be carried out on hospital and outreach education. There would be a change to Post 16 funding arrangements which would be moved into the DSG, but the detail of this would not be known until the guidance was issued.

## Central Services Block

The allocation for 2019/20 would remain unchanged from 2018/19, but the DfE was looking to move to percentage reductions. There was a concern that some local authorities which were naturally unwinding their historic funding might get hit twice and officers were looking into this. Some elements such as Private Finance Initiative (PFI) costs would not decrease over time and this had been highlighted with officials.

The following points were made in discussion of the 2019/20 Dedicated Schools Grant and National Funding Formula and in response to questions:

- Officers stated that a briefing note would be provided to schools and academies to share with parents, governors and staff;
- The DfE had given no information on salary increases. The Trades Union Observer commented that the Trades Union Side was anticipating a settlement of 3.5%;
- An Academy Secondary member commented that their contacts in the DfE were not now expecting to move to a hard formula in a two year period as previously planned. Officers stated that they were still expecting the introduction of a hard formula and that there might be some clarification of the timing of the move in the DfE's July announcement;
- An Observer commented that the argument for additional funding was made more difficult by the number of schools which were holding significant reserves (minute 62 below also refers). Both the County Council's General Purposes Committee and Children and Young People Committee had previously raised this as an issue. An Academy Secondary member commented that a 3.5% pay rise would wipe out many schools' reserves;
- Officers stated that there had been no policy update in relation to maintained nursery schools. The Maintained Nursery representative commented that the National Association of Head Teachers had launched a campaign in support of maintained nursery schools, but expressed concern at the uncertainty of the situation going forward.

It was resolved to:

- a) note and consider the update provided from the working group; and
- b) consider any next steps for the Initiative for Fair Funding for Children's Education.

## **62. MAINTAINED SCHOOLS AND DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT FINANCIAL HEALTH**

The Head of Integrated Finance Services reported the rounded maintained school balances for each sector, noting a change of £0.7k from the original published balances and the figures which had been amended to reflect in-year academy conversions. Changes in individual school balances could be attributed to a variety of factors including delayed or cancelled spending decisions due to uncertainty about future funding, using balances to maintain current staffing levels and class structures or

reprioritising revenue resources to allow for the possibility of capitalisation in future years. The report contained headline figures, but more granular information could be brought back to a future meeting if members would find that useful. At present only two schools were reporting a deficit balance which implied good financial management in maintained schools. However, officers would remain in close contact with all schools under financial pressure. The Government was looking to review the Schools Financial Value Standards (SFVS) in the next few years and to introduce something similar for academies. The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) carry forward of a £720k deficit to 2018/19 related predominantly to pressures on the High Needs budget. This would be off-set in-year by some underspends and one-off mitigations, but if these were unavailable the following year there would be significant pressure on the High Needs Block in 2019/20. It was proposed to draft a consultation document to bring to the Forum's next meeting in October 2018 for comment before this was sent to schools.

The following points arose in discussion of the report and in response to questions:

- Paragraph 6.1: An Observer questioned the reference to 'recoupment' and asked for more information about what this meant in practice. Officers stated that that the table was in the format required by the DfE. The DfE recouped the money to go to academies after the funding formula had been applied. This was not a straightforward calculation and officers were prudent in producing the Council's estimates of the figures to ensure the best position. Officers would challenge the DfE figures if needed;
- The Vice Chairman noted that a transfer of £0.7m had been required from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in 2017/18 to help meet the significant pressure which existed on High Needs provision. He questioned what would happen if an even larger sum was needed in the current financial year. There was a need to have an informed debate about the pressures being faced and how these could best be met. There needed to be a clear understanding that much of the High Needs budget went back to maintained schools to support their provision. Members needed to be as well informed as possible about the expected end of year position when the Forum met next in October and considered this issue in more detail;  
(**Action:** Head of Integrated Finance Services)
- Officers noted the concern expressed from some quarters in relation to the surplus revenue balances held by some schools. The report set out the challenge process which was followed where appropriate which included gaining a proper understanding of the issues faced by individual schools. In some cases funds might have been prudently set aside for example to fund capital projects, so it was important that each case was evaluated individually.

A Maintained Primary representative acknowledged the concerns about excessive surplus revenue balances, but commented that they were equally concerned about the larger number of schools with very low reserves. They questioned how these schools would manage if an unforeseen pressure should occur.

- An Observer commented that they knew nothing about the reserves held by secondary schools as they were all now academies. Officers stated the figures relating to academies were not straightforward as balances could quite properly be consolidated across schools within multi-academy trusts (MATs), and some MATs covered more than one local authority area. An Academy Secondary

representative commented that all academies were required to have their accounts audited and published on their schools' websites. Another Academy Secondary representative commented that details of individual academies' balances could be viewed online and undertook to provide members with details (Clerks' note: This information can be viewed at <https://schools-financial-benchmarking.service.gov.uk/>);

- A Maintained Primary representative commented that it might be helpful to get a sense of the surplus per pupil. An Observer commented that they would like to see the data relating to carry-forward in relation to Individual School Budgets (ISB) refined to give greater detail as it would be important to understand these sums in more detail when lobbying Government for additional funding. Officers stated that they would reflect on what information might be needed from schools to understand what elements of the surplus were grant funding, committed expenditure and uncommitted expenditure;
- A Maintained Primary representative commented that there were many positive aspects of the new Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), but they clearly raised expectations about the type and level of support which would be provided. Several members commented that the detail and cost of those elements of an EHCP relating to health care were rarely included on the completed Plan. This represented a fundamental deficiency and raised questions about whether the cost of some health care needs was being met from the education budget.

It was resolved to:

- a) note the contents of the report and the proposed approach to managing the brought forward deficit on Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budgets.

## **63. REVIEW OF MEMBERSHIP AND PROPORTIONALITY**

The Chairman stated that he and the Vice Chairman would withdraw for discussion and voting on recommendation *d) to extend the three Academy member appointments due to end on 31 August 2018 until 31 December 2018 to maintain proportionate representation pending further elections and appointments* as this included their own appointments. It was agreed that Tony Davies, Maintained Primary representative, would take the Chair for discussion of this recommendation.

The Clerk stated national regulations governed the composition, constitution and procedures for schools forums and were set out in The Schools Forum Regulations (2012) (as amended). The Department for Education (DfE) also published and periodically updated the Schools Forum Operational and Good Practice Guide together with guidance on Schools Forums' structure, powers and responsibilities. Due to uncertainty around the future role of schools forums and difficulties revising the arrangements for the appointment of academies members it had been some time since the composition of the Cambridgeshire Schools Forum had been formally reviewed. As four appointments would come to an end in August 2018 it was timely to bring this issue back to the Forum now for consideration.

Schools Forums were made up of schools members (maintained schools), academies members and non-school members (for example, Post 16 providers and Independent or Voluntary Sector Early Years providers). Schools and academies members must together comprise at least two thirds of the membership of the Forum and the

Regulations stated that ‘...primary schools, secondary schools (that is, maintained schools) and Academies must be broadly proportionately represented on the forum,

having regard to the total number of pupils registered at them.’ The Operational and Good Practice Guide further stated that ‘The Schools Forum Regulations provide a framework for the appointment of members, but allow a considerable degree of discretion in order to accommodate local priorities and practice.’ The ratio of pupils in maintained schools to those in academies based on the January 2018 census data was 41.7% to 58.3%. On that basis it was recommended that with effect from 1 September 2018 membership of the Forum should be revised to eight Maintained representatives, twelve Academies representatives and two Non-School Members. Whilst the Forum would agree the number of Academy representatives to be appointed in accordance with the Regulations and Good Practice Guide it would be for Academy proprietors to determine the composition of their representation.

The following points were raised in discussion of the report or in response to questions:

- It was a requirement that at least one maintained School’s representative should represent governing bodies of maintained Schools and one should represent headteachers of such Schools;
- It would be important to ensure that all maintained Schools Governors were made aware of the vacancy and offered the opportunity to stand for election;
- Members welcomed the proposal to amend the Schools Forum Constitution to establish a process to address repeated non-attendance, but asked whether it would be possible for the Forum to terminate an appointment should this happen rather than asking the nominating group to do so. The Clerk undertook to find out;  
(**Action:** Democratic Services Officer)
- The academy proprietors’ group established by the Service Director for Education would offer a forum in which to discuss Academy representation;
- An Academy Primary representative expressed concern at the possible shape of Academy representation set out at paragraph 2.5.4 (four primary representatives, six secondary representatives plus one special school representative and one alternative provision representative as required in the Regulations) and commented that they felt strongly that there should be greater representation for primary academies. The Clerk stated that the figures in the report were based on pupil numbers in primary and secondary academies and showed how these sectors might be represented. However, there was no requirement within the Regulations for academies members to be split between primary and secondary representatives and the decision on this would be for Academy proprietors.

It was resolved to:

- a) revise Schools’ representation as follows with effect from 1 September 2018:

Schools Members (Maintained):

Nursery	1
Primary	4
Secondary	0



Special	1
Alternative Provision	1
Governor	1
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- b) revise Academy representation to 12 members with effect from 1 September 2018;
- c) advise the Academy Proprietors Group of the number of places for Academy representatives from 1 September 2018 and for officers to discuss with them how they wish their representation to be shaped going forward;
- d) extend the three Academy member appointments due to end on 31 August 2018 until 31 December 2018 to maintain proportionate representation pending further elections and appointments;
- e) confirm Non-School Member representation should remain unchanged at two members: one representative of the Early Years Reference Group and one 16-19 education provider representative;
- f) amend the Schools Forum Constitution to establish a process to address repeated non-attendance as set out at paragraph 3.2 of the report;
- g) review the membership and composition of the Schools Forum annually in March/April;
- h) authorise the Clerk to amend the Schools Forum Constitution to reflect the changes agreed at the meeting and any consequential changes and to publish this on the County Council website.

#### **64. AGENDA PLAN**

The agenda plan was reviewed and noted.

#### **65. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Forum is due to meet next on Friday 5 October 2018 at 10.00am in the Kreis Viersen Room, Shire Hall, Cambridge.

(Chairman/ Chairwoman)