

Cambridgeshire Schools Forum - Minutes

Date: Friday 4 November 2022

Time: 14:00pm – 15:30pm

Venue: Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall, Alconbury

Present:

Academy Primary - Susannah Connell

Diocese of Ely Church Schools - Canon Andrew Read

Local Authority Primary - Sasha Howard

Hospital Schooling – Nadine Gooding-Hebert

Maintained Primary – Nicki Brown and Guy Underwood

Maintained Nursery – Alex Pearson

Maintained Special Schools - Joanne Hardwick

Maintained Governor - Paul Stratford (Vice-Chair)

Trade Union – Rob Turner

Other Academy Sector Appointments - Adrian Ball, Christopher Bennet, John King, Duncan Ramsey, Carin Taylor, and Jon Culpin (Chair)

Cambridgeshire County Council - Councillors Claire Daunton and Bryony Goodliffe.

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

27. Appointment of the Chair

It was resolved unanimously to re-elect Jon Culpin as Chair for the Schools Forum for the municipal years 2022-24.

28. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Simon Bainbridge, Lesley Birch, Clare Clark, Jon Duveen, Ryan Kelsall, Alex Pearson, Richard Spencer, Mark Vickers (substituted by Jo Gillman) and Councillor Simone Taylor.

No declarations of interest were received.

29. Schools Forum Minutes – 25 July

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2022 were approved as a correct record.

The action log was noted.

29. Update on Appointments

Schools Forum were asked to note the new appointments outlined in the report. One vacancy remained for academy appointments.

The presenting officer highlighted that there had been an omission from the report and asked forum to note that Nikki Brown, Headteacher at Morley Memorial Primary School, replaced Liz Bassett as a Maintained Primary Head representative on the forum.

It was resolved to:

Note the new appointments outlined in Section 3.1 of the report.

30. Schools Budget Setting

The forum received a report and a presentation that outlined the 2022-23 Schools Budget setting process, which based itself upon national budget allocation and 2021-22 pupil numbers. The presentation covered;

- Funding Formula;
- High Needs Block Transfers;
- Notional SEN / High Needs Contingency;
- Central School Services Block;

- De-Delegations within maintained primary schools; and
- Growth Funding / new schools.

The national budget allocated to Cambridgeshire was the third a three-year settlement and set in July. Since then, the energy crisis, pay awards, and local government pay settlement had occurred which affected expenditure. However, the national Autumn Budget and Department for Education Budget were anticipated and may affect allocation figures.

In relation to the Funding Formula;

- The officer noted that there was an error on the presentation which should read that data would change following receipt of the October 2022 census, rather than October 2023 census.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to Notional SEN / High Needs Contingency;

- Showed favour for Option 2, in appendix 3 a, which would be updated following receipt of the October 2022 census. This option targeted resources at identified needs.
- Expressed belief that EHCP funding and SEN funding were separate and therefore should be targeted through separate streams, as was modelled in Option 2.
- Noted that the funding offered one off support to schools to contribute towards disproportional numbers of children with special educational needs. Once granted, the school determined use of the money and spending was not controlled by the local authority.
- Showed concern that Option 2 may incentivise EHCPs, which would not produce their desired decrease.
- Highlighted children with a lower level of need as needing to be considered in the decision-making process.
- Suggested and agreed to review modelling of a third option which would consider a combined measure of both Option 1 and 2. **Action Required.**
- Showed support for recommendation d) which would reduce the sense of postcode lottery.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to Central School Services Block;

- Commented upon the broadband subsidiary reduction which caused a significant increase in school costs.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to Growth Funding and new schools;

- Welcomed the reduction of bureaucracy with regard to the new process.
- Noted that, in comparison to other authorities, funding allocations were less generous, but Cambridgeshire offered greater flexibility to new schools and more schools were eligible for growth funding. This process had been influenced by guidelines on best practice.
- Expressed that the process seemed fair and open.
- Noted that the Strategic Finance Manager believed head teacher participation on the Growth Funding Panel had been beneficial and would be repeated.
- A member highlighted that all decisions approved by the forum were not the 'preferred' option, but the 'least bad'.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the next steps:

- The Autumn Funding Statement would be released 23 November 2022 and inform the school funding budget. It was not anticipated that the schools budget would be protected - early indications suggested palliative but not material measures. A member suggested that this adjustment was therefore political and not child centred.
- Pressed the importance of Schools Forum continuing to vocalise longstanding concern for the impact of funding constraints on standards, employment, sustainability, children's material outcomes, and small school deficits.
- Additional pressures on schools were anticipated to arise from: pay awards; the high court ruling on support staff holidays; an increase in children with high needs following the pandemic; a reduced ability for parents to subsidise costs, such as those associated with swimming or transport, as a result of the cost of the living crisis. It was recognised the pandemic had also increased pressure on the budget for accessing children's health, such as with speech and language therapy. It was also possible Health funding would reduce.
- Staff recruitment and retention was also highlighted as a growing concern. Current staff resilience had been impacted by the pandemic and other sectors offered more money, fewer additional hours and easier work.
- Noted pre-existing actions to establish the dire position of funding:
 - A letter sent from Cambridgeshire Primary Heads and the Maintained Primary Heads.

- A scheduled statement on secondary school pressures from CSH.
 - A letter from the F40 group, which had been circulated to Schools Forum members.
 - A paper to MPs from Cambridgeshire County Council was being developed, which would demonstrate the implications of pressures using qualitative data such as geography, school type, and SEN impact.
 - Challenges and early analysis by Cambridgeshire Primary Heads had been shared with civil servants by Cambridgeshire County Council.
 - A letter had been sent to local MPs which outlined the impact on the average primary school of the £40K uplift for support staff; and for teachers £10K 2022/23, £12k 2023/24. This did not include the impact of inflation or energy prices. Anticipated percentage of schools in deficit were: 2022/23 - 52%; 2023/24 - 80%; 2024/25 - 92%.
- It was suggested that future correspondence and campaigning use quantum data, specific data, and qualitative evidence of the impact on individuals. Asked that forum members gather this data for their schools. The timeframe for submission of this quantitative data would be given after budget consultation.
 - A campaign strategy would be discussed in a meeting between the Chair of Schools Forum and the Director: Education. The following future actions were suggested to highlight the funding gap:
 - A meeting between the Director: Education, the Schools Forum Chair and MPs to highlight safety valve concerns and sector pressures, potentially occurring in January 2023. It would be discussed whether governors and Schools Forum members should also attend.
 - Ask headteachers to emphasise to Ofsted the impact that funding pressures is having on provision.
 - Encourage inspectors to ask how the cost-of-living crisis is impacting schools.
 - Increased campaigning targeting parents and those on the electoral role through organisations such as Schools Forum, Cambridgeshire Primary Heads, Cambridgeshire Secondary Heads. When enacting this, it was suggested that emphasising the impact of the overall funding restraints on an exemplar child may help parents to gain perspective.

- Form agreements with other directorates, such as Health or Business Improvement and Development, which would enable Education to receive income support from them. Calculations could be made for this, however, the Director: Education stated that the school budget was so great that other services could not support them sufficiently.
- Use the forum as a campaigning platform.
- Recommended reading 'School Costs and Funding: The Coming Crash' by the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

It was resolved to:

Funding Formula

- a) Comment on the proposed LA approach for the Cambridgeshire Schools Funding Formula for 23/24.

High Needs Block Transfer

- b) Following previous discussions in respect of the Safety Valve Intervention Programmed Schools Forum, approve a block transfer between the Schools Block and High Needs Block of 1% - (circa £4.4m – actual amount to be confirmed on receipt of final DSG allocations and subject to Secretary of State approval).

Notional SEN / High Needs Contingency

- c) Comment on the options for allocating the available £450k high needs contingency fund.
- d) Comment on the proposal to increase the percentage of delegated budget identified as notional SEN to align with regional and statistical neighbours

Central School Services Block

- e) Approve the continuation of the £733k contribution to Combined Budgets to support early intervention family workers.
- f) Approve the continuation of the £467k to support the Admissions Service.
- g) Approve the continuation of the £3k to support the servicing of Schools Forum.

- h) Note the proposed budgets for the national copyright licence arrangements, retained duties funding and the residual balance. Final figures will be presented at the January meeting of Schools Forum.

Education Functions and De-Delegations – Maintained Primary only

- i) Maintained Primary School representatives on Schools Forum are asked to note the proposed retained funding and de-delegations to be approved at the December meeting.

Growth Funding and New Schools

- j) Note and comment on the proposed changes to the Growth Funding to apply to 2023/24 only.
- k) Note the proposed variation to pupil numbers. Final numbers will be presented to Schools Forum in January.

31. Agenda Plan

The Democratic Services Officer highlighted that a report on the safety valve would be added to the agenda for the next meeting, pending receipt of response.

It was resolved to:

Note the agenda plan.

32. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

Chair