Agenda Item No: 3

CAMBRIDGESHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM: MINUTES

Date: Friday 17 March 2017

Time: 10.00am – 11.55am

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, A Matthews, D Parfitt, A Reeder, Dr K Taylor, S Tinsley and M Woods.

Observers

S Conant	Church of England Diocese of Ely Board of Education (substituting for A Read)
J Cornwell	UNISON (substituting for R Turner)
G Fewtrell	Teachers' Union
Councillor P Downes	Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC)
Councillor J Whitehead	Cambridgeshire County Council

Officers
K Grimwade – Director for Learning (CCC), J Lee – Head of Integrated Finance Services (LGSS), M Wade – Strategic Finance Manager (CCC), Alison Bretherton – Head of Workforce Planning and Strategy (LGSS), Linda Claxton – Payroll Manager (LGSS), M Moore – Accountant (CCC) and R Greenhill (Clerk - CCC)

Apologies:
Forum Members**:** S Blyth, A Hutchinson, N Jones, J North and R Waldau

Observers: Councillor D Harty, A Read (substituted by S Conant) and R Turner (substituted by J Cornwell)

Officers: M Teasdale – Director of Strategy and Commissioning and Dr H Phelan, Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Services

177. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were noted as recorded above.

178. VARIATION TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman advised members that he proposed to vary the order of business from the published agenda to take the presentation on the Apprenticeship Levy before Future Budget Considerations to ensure sufficient time for questions.

179. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 27 JANUARY 2017 AND ACTION LOG

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Action Log was noted.

180. NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA UPDATE

The Forum received a report from the Head of Integrated Finance Services which set out the current position on the National Funding Formula (NFF) and sought final comments from members on the draft Schools Forum responses to the NFF Consultation Stage 2 and High Needs Funding Reform Consultation Stage 2.

The proposed High Needs Funding Formula remained an area of particular concern in view of the increasing number of students with high needs in Cambridgeshire and the growing complexity of those needs. Conversations were continuing in relation to the local offer, but there was concern that the existing flexibility to respond to local need might no longer be available from 2018/19 onward.

Paragraph 3.2 set out details of the extensive consultation on the draft responses which had already taken place. This had included two meetings between Forum Members, Observers and a broad spectrum of Cambridgeshire headteachers with Heidi Allen MP, Lucy Frazer QC MP and Daniel Zeichner MP. The Chairman expressed his thanks to all those who had attended these meetings which he felt had made very clear the impact of the proposals on schools in real terms.

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

- Officers confirmed that planning assumptions were being based on a worst case scenario of no local flexibility to move funds between blocks to respond to local need;
- The number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) being issued in Cambridgeshire was increasing and there was concern at the lag in funding to meet this increase in demand;
- Officers advised that similar structural deficits were being reported across a number of Local Authorities, but the number of students with EHCPs in Cambridgeshire was higher than in other comparable Local Authorities which created a particularly acute pressure on funding;
- The Cambridgeshire Primary Heads Group had expressed concern that calling for flexibility across funding blocks suggested a tacit acceptance that some areas would be under-funded and would require a top-up from other funding blocks;
- Officers confirmed that the 2017/18 settlement would be used as the baseline for future settlements;
- In planning for 2018/19 the Forum would need to consider the extent to which, if at all, it would implement the anticipated national hard funding formula;
- Members noted the difficulty in fully representing the broad spectrum of opinion of schools in the Forum's consolidated responses to the consultations and emphasised the importance of individual schools and Trusts also replying to the consultations in order to fully represent their particular views and experience;
- One academy representative stated that in their case they saw an advantage to a hard funding model because it would provide a defined sum to work with going forward which would aid financial planning. It would also remove the expectation that the Local Authority should address shortfalls in provision at a local level. However, they acknowledged that from the Schools Forum was looking beyond the needs of individual schools to the wider needs of Cambridgeshire's schools as a whole. In that context they recognised that a soft funding model also offered certain benefits.

Members asked that the draft response to the NFF Consultation Stage 2 should be revised to reflect the following:
(**Action:** Strategic Finance Manager)

- Paragraph 14:
  i. The reference to the future role of Schools Forums should be strengthened to make clear that a hard funding formula would be unable to meet the needs of every school and that the need for sufficient flexibility at a local level to address this would be vital;
  ii. The reference to the Education Services Grant (ESG) should be strengthened from '… could create issues…' to read '…would create issues…';
  iii. A reference to the impact of the apprenticeship levy should be added.
- To strengthen the representations regarding the sparsity factor;
- To emphasise the full social and economic impact on families, communities and the Local Authority if the introduction of a hard funding formula led to the closure of small rural schools. This should include the knock-on effect of needing to accommodate the displaced pupils in other schools and transporting them to and from those schools.

Members asked that the draft response to the High Needs Funding Reform Consultation Stage 2 should be revised to reflect the following:

- To emphasise concern about the lag in funding to meet changing need;
- Concern that basing future funding on historical levels would carry forward the disadvantage which Cambridgeshire had already experienced for many years;
- The wish to move to a needs-led formula.

The Chairman thanked Members for their comments and said that these would be reflected in the comments submitted to the Department for Education on behalf of the Cambridgeshire Schools Forum. He noted that comments would be submitted separately by Cambridgeshire County Council and also by individual schools and schools groups.

It was resolved to:

a) Note the work which had been undertaken since the Forum met last in January 2017;

b) Make final comments on the draft Schools Forum consultation responses prior to their submission.

181. APPRENTICESHIP LEVY

The Forum received a presentation from the Head of Workforce Planning and Strategy (LGSS) which set out the change in the national approach to apprenticeships with particular focus on the implications for schools (copy attached at Appendix 1). Central government had set a target of 2.3% of the workforce of public sector bodies being engaged in an apprenticeships each year. Whilst this was not a statutory requirement at present, employers would be required to report back on their performance against this target.

The following points were raised in discussion of the presentation and in response to questions from members:

- The LGSS Learning and Development team had applied to become an accredited training provider under the new arrangements and their offer would support the development of the schools workforce;
- Levy funding could only be spent on the training and assessment costs of an approved course delivered by an approved provider. It would not cover salary or any other associated employment costs;
- LGSS were setting up a support service for schools regarding the apprenticeship levy. This would include a central email address for any queries;
- Officers from Cambridgeshire County Council had been involved in one of a number of trail-blazer groups which were taking forward work in relation to teaching. This included looking at both a post-graduate teacher training route and the possibility of an under-graduate training route. Input from members of the Schools Forum on what they would like to see included would be most welcome and should be directed to Helen Manley in the Schools Partnership Service;
- A Schools' Guide to the apprenticeship reforms was due for publication the following week and a link would be sent to all members of the Forum when available;
  (**Action:** Head of Workforce Planning and Strategy (LGSS))
- The revised apprenticeship arrangements would apply to employees of all ages and experience who needed to learn new skills. They would be available up to degree level and possibly to post-graduate level and would include social work and teaching;
- Apprenticeships would be available for between one and four years;
- There was no obligation on employers to convert an apprenticeship into a permanent post, although this would be the preferred outcome. However, there would need to be a sound justification for the apprenticeship being offered;
- Union representatives and others expressed concern that apprenticeships could be misused to provide a cheap labour force with no guarantee of employment at the end of their training;
- Some small schools with a levy of less than £1.5k per annum would not qualify to employ an apprentice. However, officers were exploring whether two schools might be able to band together to share an apprentice and, if so, whether this could be done across maintained and non-maintained schools. The Forum would be informed of the outcome of this work;
  (**Action:** Head of Workforce Planning and Strategy (LGSS))
- The Chairman of the Cambridgeshire Primary Heads Group expressed concern that for many small maintained schools the levy represented a new cost burden with no benefits;
- Clarification was sought of whether all of the required 20% of time spent outside of the workplace could be taken outside of term-time;
  (**Action:** Head of Workforce Planning and Strategy (LGSS))

The Chairman thanked the Head of Workforce Planning and Strategy (LGSS)) for an informative presentation and response to questions and welcomed her offer to provide Forum members with links to further sources of information.
(**Action:** Head of Workforce Planning and Strategy)

182. FUTURE BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The Forum received a report setting out details of the key areas of current expenditure, functions and services which would require review during the next six to nine months as a result of the national funding proposals.

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

Centrally Retained Funding (including historic commitments):

- As part of the national funding formula proposals the Department for Education (DfE) had confirmed the creation of a central school services block which would include funding for areas previously included within the Education Services Grant (ESG) and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). These would include the growth fund and admissions fund and the servicing of Schools Forum;
- A report on the Cambridgeshire Public Services Network (CPSN) Broadband Contract would be submitted to the Forum's next meeting in July;
- There was an expectation that historic commitments would unwind over time and funding would then be recycled into other areas;
- Officers confirmed that work was underway to establish when costs would fall to schools and that schools would be kept informed of this.

De-Delegations:

- It was not yet clear whether the current arrangements whereby maintained primary schools pooled funding for an agreed range of services would be allowable under the arrangements for the new National Funding Formula. No change was expected in 2018-19, but looking further ahead it would be necessary to review how services would operate. This might include a buy-back arrangement if there were viable levels of demand.

Education Functions:

- Officers were in regular contact with the DfE and the Regional Schools Commissioner on this issue and the direction of travel remained clearly towards a school-led and increasingly academised system with an on-going but changed role for the Local Authority;
- Preliminary discussions were taking place at officer level with Peterborough and Northamptonshire and other local authorities to begin exploring where it might in future be more efficient and effective to join up functions;
- A member noted that the National Audit Office (NAO) had highlighted that the DfE was approving free schools in areas where there was no basic need. This had significant implications for the viability of existing schools in those areas and the local authority budget.

High Needs Block:

- The Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Services was taking forward a detailed review of funding allocations within the High Needs Block, Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) provision and the Integrated 0-25 SEND Service. Updates would be provided to future meetings of the Forum;

- The Vice Chairman emphasised the urgency of the high needs funding re-assessment and said that the Forum would welcome sight of an early draft of the findings so that it could begin the process of considering these.

It was resolved to:

a) Note the approach described in the report.

183. COMPOSITION OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM: UPDATE

The Forum received a report from the Clerk which provided an update on the current composition of the Cambridgeshire Schools Forum.

The composition remained compliant with the majority of requirements set out in the Schools Forum (England) Regulations 2012 and the Schools Forum Operational and Good Practice Guide March 2015. However, it was acknowledged that the existing arrangements did not fully reflect the requirement that academies' representatives should be elected by academy proprietors. The Regional Schools Commissioner had indicated his willingness to assist with obtaining co-ordinated agreement from proprietors' on the detailed arrangements, but substantive work had been postponed pending the issue of revised guidance on the role and composition of Schools Forums which was expected to form part of central government's wider review of schools' funding arrangements.

It was resolved to:

a) Note the position.

184. AGENDA PLAN

The Clerk reported that meeting dates for the 2017/18 academic year had been agreed by the Chairman and by the Chairs of the Cambridgeshire Primary and Secondary Heads Groups. Details would be published on the Cambridgeshire County Council website and sent to members the following week.

It was resolved to:

a) Note the Schools Forum Forward Agenda Plan.

185. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Forum will meet next on Friday 7 July at 10.00am in the Kreis Viersen Room, Shire Hall, Cambridge CB3 0AP.

Chairman