

CAMBRIDGESHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM: MINUTES

Date: 17th January 2020

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 12.15 p.m.

Venue: Council Chamber, Shire Hall, Castle Street, Cambridge, CB3 0AP.

Present: Maintained Primary

Liz Bassett
Tony Davies
Sasha Howard
Guy Underwood

Academy Primary

Susannah Connell

Academy Alternative Provision

Nick Morley

Academy Board Member

Philip Hodgson (Chairman)

Other Academy Appointments

Adrian Ball
Christopher Bennet
Jon Culpin
Ryan Kellsall
Patsy Peres
Richard Spencer

Maintained Nursery School

Rikke Waldau

Early Years Reference Group

Deborah Parfitt

Post 16 Further Education

Jeremy Lloyd

Maintained Special School

Lucie Calow

Academy Special School

Dr Kim Taylor OBE

Cambridgeshire County Council

Councillor Peter Downes (CCC) (Until 11:52am)

Observers

Julie Cornwell (Non Teachers Union)
Jon Duveen (Teachers Unions)
Joe McCrossan (Diocese of East Anglia)
Andrew Read (Diocese of Ely)

Officers

J Lewis, R Sanderson, M Wade, J Veitch

Also In attendance

Joanne Hardwick (Maintained Special School)

Apologies: Maintained Secondary

Carole Moss

Other Academy Appointments

John King

Maintained Pupil Referral Unit

Amanda Morris-Drake

Maintained Governor

Paul Stratford

Observers

Councillor Simon Bywater (CCC)
Councillor Joan Whitehead (CCC)

DOCTOR ALAN RODGER

The Chairman read out a tribute to Dr Alan Roger, the Forum's Vice Chairman who had sadly passed away early in the year after a period of illness (Attached as Appendix 1 to these minutes). As a mark of respect Forum stood and observed a minutes silence. A condolence card was sent round to Forum members for signature.

138. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were as set out above.

There were no declarations of interest.

139. SCHOOLS FORUM MINUTES – 18TH DECEMBER 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th December 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

140. ACTION LOG

The Forum noted the Minute Action Log with the following updates:

- Minutes 136 – Schools Funding Update – The Service Director, Education informed Forum that he followed up the action request with a former colleague regarding how Suffolk County Council (SCC) were managing their deficit. He stated that SCC had implemented a deficit action plan that proposed significant reductions to the financial support allocated to children and the High Needs Block (HNB). He commented that SCC believed that they had an effective delivery plan to implement the changes. He explained that SCC were facing similar financial challenges to Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) due to the inadequacies of the national funding formula.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to the action log:

- queried whether SCC had proposed a transfer to the HNB greater than 0.5%. The Service Director, Education confirmed that SCC had proposed a 0.5% transfer.

141. SCHOOLS FUNDING UPDATE – JANUARY 2020

Schools Forum considered a report providing an update on the latest local funding formula proposals for the 2020/21 Schools budget setting round. The Service Director, Education and the Strategic Finance Business Partner drew the Forum's attention to the 2020/21 Dedicated Schools Grant Funding – Addendum (Schools Forum – January 2020), the Illustrative Schools Funding Scenarios – 2020/21 and the Update on Send Recovery Plan documents, attached as Appendix 2, 3 and 4 to these minutes.

The Service Director, Education:

- highlighted the proposed additional recommendation found within the presentation. He stated that as Forum had approved a 0% transfer at the last meeting, the recommendation was requesting Forum to reconsider a block transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the HNB. The Chairman requested more information regarding the exact time scales for agreeing the final budget. The Strategic Finance Business Partner confirmed that the budget setting process depended on when Officers received approval for the 1.8% transfer from the Secretary of State. The Service Director, Education confirmed that the Local Authority (LA) had to set a budget on the 21st January 2020, with a view that they would resubmit the budget following the CYP Committee meeting also on the 21st January. He believed that the LA could still re-submit budget proposals up until the 28th February.
- informed Forum that on the 13th January 2020, the Strategic Finance Business Partner, the Chairman and himself had met with Officers from the Department for Education (DfE). At this meeting Officers submitted their recovery plan for the HNB, discussed the financial challenges faced by Cambridgeshire and the affects this was having on schools. Officers also proposed a number of requests to the DfE such as a revision to the national funding formula to increase the amount of money allocated to the HNB and further financial support to CCC to help mitigate their deficit through cash flow loans. However, Officers from the DfE were unable to provide any answers to the queries raised by the LA at this meeting while commenting as to how inclusive Cambridgeshire were.
- informed Forum that he had met with Lucy Frazer MP to discuss the financial pressures the LA faced. He commented that she had been very supportive of the issues raised. In addition, he had arranged separate meetings for the following week with Steven Barkley MP and Daniel Zeichner MP to undertake similar conversations. A further meeting had been arranged with Nick Gibb MP (Minister of State for School Standards at the Department for Education) on the 28th January 2020, in which he had been invited to represent Cambridgeshire County Council.
- confirmed that Officers had formally written to the Education Schools Funding Agency (ESFA) to request a £16m loan to negate the cash flow challenges the LA were facing.

The Chairman confirmed that the presentation the Service Director, Education and the Strategic Finance Business Partner had given at their meeting with the DfE was comprehensive and fully highlighted the financial issues Cambridgeshire was facing. No indication was given by the DfE officers that there would be a positive outcome arising from the meeting.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to Appendix 2, 3 and 4:

- sought more information regarding how Cambridgeshire's financial position compared to that of other LAs in England. The Service Director, Education suggested that 24 other LAs had submitted deficit recovery plans to the DfE. He speculated that around 50 other LAs would be faced with a deficit on the HNB by the end of this financial year. He commented that the continued rise in pupil numbers had caused an increase in financial pressure on LAs.
- requested confirmation regarding the cuts that would occur if Forum agreed a 0% transfer. The Service Director, Education stated a 0% transfer could lead to

significant reduction in the financial supported given to schools with children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). He commented that the proposed 1.8% would help mitigate the current deficit.

- queried the material impacts a 0.5% transfer would have on the current deficit compared to a 0% transfer. The Service Director, Education stated that this had not been estimated completely, and while a 0.5% would not solve the financial issues the LA faced, it would be a contribution towards the outstanding deficit. He reminded Forum that the consultation response agreed to a 0.5% transfer. Another member of the Forum raised concerns that a 0.5% transfer would lead to greater debts within schools.
- stated that at the last meeting Forum had agreed on a 0% transfer to send a political message to Central Government and queried whether Forum should now be discussing the possibility of a 1.8% transfer. The Service Director, Education confirmed that Officers were considering a 1.8% transfer, subject to the Secretary of State's approval. He stated that if the Secretary of State did agree to a 1.8% transfer then a comprehensive debate would be required at CYP Committee as to the financial implications this would have on schools budgets in Cambridgeshire. The Service Director, Education stated that this was a difficult decision and the LA would have to consider in detail where the proposed savings would be made for the next financial year.
- expressed concerns that Forum could be facing this same financial situation year after year.
- requested more information regarding the number of referrals for Educational Health Care Plan (EHCPs). The Service Director, Education confirmed that the demand for EHCP referrals was increasing and the number of EHCPs approved had increased by 60 in December 2019 alone. This increase in demand continued to put greater financial pressure on the LA.
- stated that it was important for Forum to agree on a recommendation that gave Officers the best opportunity to put pressure on Government for a better funding settlement, he believed that agreeing a 0.5% transfer would not do this. The member stated that at the last meeting, Forum decided that they could not agree to a further transfer that would support an inadequate funding formula for Cambridgeshire. The Service Director, Education suggested that agreeing a 0% transfer did send a strong political message but raised concerns regarding the impact this decision would have on school's budgets in the future.
- suggested that a 0% transfer would be more beneficial for their school compared to a 0.5% transfer. The Service Director, Education reiterated that this was a difficult situation as the financial implications of the funding changes the LA was proposing would vary from school to school in the County.
- queried the relevance of Forum agreeing to a 0.5% transfer when a 1.8% was still a possibility. He believed that if a 1.8% transfer was being proposed then Forum should stick with the agreed 0% transfer and make the political statement to Government. The Service Director, Education explained that the CYP Committee could only agree to a 1.8% transfer if the Secretary of State approved it. He clarified that if the Secretary of State did agree to a 1.8% transfer and

Forum did not agree to a 0.5% transfer then the only option CYP would have to consider would be either a 1.8% increase or a 0% transfer.

- a County Councillor explained that he was to attend and represent Cambridgeshire at a F40 meeting next week. This group consisted of the 40 LAs who received the least funding from Government. He suggested that it would be politically beneficial if these 40 LAs could agree to lobby Government for a better funding formula. The Service Director, Education stated that it was critical for Cambridgeshire voice to be heard at this Group.
- queried whether during the Director's meeting with Officers from the DfE, they had shown any awareness regarding the fact that the financial issues faced in Cambridgeshire were also found at a national level. The Service Director, Education explained that the DfE had acknowledged that there was not enough funding allocated to Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) services nationally. He explained to the DfE representative that Cambridgeshire historically had been significantly underfunded which had led to the LA and schools being put under significant financial pressure.
- explained that she was divided on the discussion as she personally believed that the Forum should send a strong political message to Government by sticking with the previously agreed 0% transfer. However, her role on the Forum was to represent her sector and her sector had agreed to approve a 0.5% transfer. With this in mind a number of members reminded Forum that they attended the meeting to represent their specific sector and not their personal views.
- sought more information regarding what schools were doing with their outstanding balances. He suggested that it would be beneficial if those schools with large balances put this money back into the County to help alleviate the funding shortfall rather than it sitting in a bank account.
- raised concerns regarding the fact that Forum had just been focusing on the possibility of a 0.5% transfer and not discussing the 1.8% transfer in detail and the effects this would have on schools in Cambridgeshire. He believed that a 1.8% transfer was going to be considered at CYP Committee if the Secretary of State approved it. The Service Director, Education stated that Forum had agreed to a 0% transfer at the last meeting and this recommendation would be fed into the discussion at the CYP Committee.
- reminded Officers that at the last meeting, all Forum members had agreed that they would not support a 1.8% transfer.
- sought more information regarding the four potential scenarios to be considered when deciding the final budget. The Service Director, Education clarified that the all four potential budget proposals presented to the Forum meeting would increase the amount of money given to schools compared to previous years.
- queried the position Forum would be put into if the CYP Committee agreed a 1.8% transfer. The Service Director, Education explained that a 1.8% transfer gave the LA time and allowed them to protect the services they currently provided for schools until potential further reforms of the national funding formula were implemented by Ministers. The Service Director, Education speculated that if Forum did agree a 0% transfer now, then next year they could be facing a

proposal for a transfer greater than 1.8%. He reminded Forum that the LA had a statutory requirement to set a balanced budget each financial year.

- queried what the Officer recommendations would be on the Schools Funding Formula 2020-21 report being presented to the CYP Committee on the 21st January 2020. The Service Director, Education confirmed that the report would not have an Officer recommendation, rather the CYP Committee would make a decision through the discussion had at the meeting. He stated that if he was asked for an opinion during this Committee meeting, he would suggest a 1.8% transfer. He strongly recommended for Forum members to attend the CYP Committee.
- asked whether they had an indication of how Members of the CYP Committee viewed a 1.8% transfer. The Service Director, Education stated that there would be no political element to the discussion at the CYP Committee but had no indication of what their decision would be.
- stated that it appeared that smaller special schools would be most at risk from the budget proposals presented today.
- suggested that it was paramount for Forum to provide the CYP Committee with as much flexibility as possible when they discussed and approved the final budget.
- queried whether the proposed £50 reduction in Minimum Per Pupil Funding (MPPF) would be brought back to Forum for approval. The Service Director, Education stated if the Secretary of State and the CYP Committee approved the 1.8% transfer then he would wish to consult with both schools and Forum on the £50 reduction. He suggested that Officers could then take Forum's decision on MPPF and recommend it to the CYP Committee.
- asked Officers whether they could record what each sector representative voted for. Other Forum members and Officers commented that this would be impracticable as some Forum members represented two sectors.
- expressed concerns regarding the fact that if Forum voted for a 0% transfer then they were making a 1.8% transfer more likely to occur as CYP Committee would have no flexibility to consider any other options. The Service Director, Education believed that Officers had until the 28th February to set the schools budget, and following the meeting they would check whether they could re-submit the budget. He commented that if the Secretary of State did not approve the 1.8% transfer then Forum could reconsider the 0.5% transfer. The Service Director, Education stated that if this happened, they could provide schools with more information regarding the specific financial implications a 0.5% transfer would cause.
(ACTION)
- The Service Director, Education reiterated the fact that if the Secretary of State did not approve the 1.8% transfer and Forum did not agree a 0.5% transfer then the only option for CYP to consider would be a 0% transfer. The Strategic Finance Business Partner explained that Forum had the authority to approve up to a 0.5% transfer, anything greater would have to be approved by the Secretary of State.

- believed that Forum should delay the vote until the LA had received confirmation regarding whether the Secretary of State had approved the proposed 1.8% transfer.
- suggested that the possibility of having a 1.8% transfer was influencing the debate around the 0.5% transfer. He believed that if the Secretary of State did not approve the 1.8% transfer then Forum could have a more comprehensive debate around the 0.5% transfer.
- requested more information regarding the financial implications the different transfer levels would have on the schools budget. The Director of Education confirmed that he would look into this **(ACTION)**.
- agreed to hold an emergency Schools Forum meeting once Officers had heard from the Secretary of State.
- confirmed that if any Forum member wished to speak at the CYP Committee they should contact Democratic Services.

Having commented on the previous budget proposals:

It was resolved to:

a) 2020/21 School Funding Arrangements

Agree to uphold the previous decision made by Forum on the 18th December 2019 to approve a 0% transfer. However, a 0.5% transfer could be reconsidered subject to Secretary of State's decision not to approve the 1.8% transfer.

b) De-Delegations

Subject to confirmation of the Department for Education (DFEs) risk protection arrangements, maintained Primary representatives on Schools Forum approved the continuation of the de-delegations in respect of insurance.

142. PROPOSED FUTURE SCHOOLS FORUM DATES AFTER JULY

Forum considered a report outlining the proposed future Schools Forum dates after July 2020.

It was resolved to

a) agree the following dates:

Friday 6th November 2020
 Wednesday 16th December 2020
 Friday 15th January 2021
 Friday 26th February 2021
 Friday 21st May 2021
 Friday 16th July 2021.

b) For officers to relook at the proposed date of Friday 26th March 2021 as this was the last day of term.

143. AGENDA PLAN

It was resolved to:

Note the agenda plan.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled Cambridgeshire Schools Forum was on Friday 28th February 2020 at 10:00 am in the Council Chamber, Shire Hall, Cambridge.

However, as discussed earlier, there might also be the need for an additional special meeting should the DfE agree to the 1.8% transfer.

Chairman
28th February 2020