

Cambridgeshire Schools Forum - Minutes

Date: Friday 15 July 2022

Time: 10:00am - 11:48am

Venue: Virtual meeting

Present:

Academy Primary - Susannah Connell

Academy Special Schools - Simon Bainbridge

Diocese of Ely Church Schools - Canon Andrew Read

Local Authority Primary - Sasha Howard

Maintained Primary - Liz Bassett and Guy Underwood

Maintained Special Schools - Joanne Hardwick

Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia - Claire Clark (non-voting observer)

Teacher Units - Jon Duveen

Other Academy Sector Appointments - Adrian Ball (from 11:00), Christopher Bennett, Lesley Birch, Ryan Kelsall, John King, Richard Spencer, Duncan Ramsey, Mark Vickers, and Jon Culpin (Chairman)

Cambridgeshire County Council - Councillors Claire Daunton and Simone Taylor.

Officers - Jonathan Lewis - Service Director Education, Tamar Oviatt-Ham – Democratic Services Officer, Rhiannon Leighton – Democratic Services Assistant, Tom Kelly, Section 151 Officer and Martin Wade, Strategic Finance Business Partner.

19. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Alex Pearson, Paul Stratford, Rob Turner and Councillor Bryony Goodliffe.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Claire Daunton.

No declarations of interest were received.

Following their departure and imminent departure, Patsy Peres and Liz Bassett were thanked for their contributions to the Board.

20. Schools Forum Minutes – 14 January 2022 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2022 were approved as a correct record.

The Forum noted the action log.

21. Review of Proportionality and Membership of Schools Forum

The Schools Forum was asked to review proportionality on the forum in relation to the latest data from the January 2022 census; which assessed whether any further changes were required to seating allocation on the forum; and to review the current vacancies and appointments identified for re-election. Following an evaluation of proportionality, it had been concluded that no changes were required. However, some appointments were eligible for review including one maintained school governor and three academy appointments, as well as one caused by the retirement of Liz Bassett. An election process for this would occur in September 2022.

It was resolved to:

Note and comment on the report.

22. Schools and Dedicated Schools Grant Financial Health

The Schools Forum received a report which set out the financial information for maintained schools, dedicated schools and academies (as published by the Department for Education [DfE] at 31 March 2022). Overall, dedicated school funding had a cumulative deficit of £39m, while the maintained school summary position remained consistent with a balance of £15.7m. Within that, some individual school balances had changed significantly – with a greater number now in excess of £150k, seven schools now in excess of £400k, while thirteen were in deficit. The balance clawback mechanism had previously been relaxed to an excess of 16% or £80k for maintained primary or special

schools and 10% for maintained secondary schools. The officer also noted that the Schools Financial Value Standards had been submitted to the Education Funding Agency, with the exception of three schools, one of which was exempt and two that were yet to submit.

Internal audit had visited fourteen maintained schools and key findings were circulated to schools.

The Service Director for Education warned that coronavirus alleviation and upcoming cost pressures affected balances found in the report.

Individual members raised the following points:

- A governor-informed reporting mechanism may capture school positions more accurately than the survey currently used.
- ISB figures may be more usefully presented as a percentage, rather than figures.
- There was concern for lowering the excess threshold significantly considering the rise in energy costs, increasing cost of living, and staff inflation pay awards. The officer responded that threshold changes would be reviewed alongside the changing national context. Balance control mechanisms would also ensure resource was moved to areas in need without negatively affecting schools with excess.
- Clarified that, despite the appearance of an overall consistent balance, funding was still required from Government due to the differing finances of individual schools and changes in pupil numbers. This would be mapped out to Government with the county's history of proficient spending. Data submission of high needs block pressures had been useful for mapping the county's position against the rest of the country.
- Agreed to review modelling projections for maintained schools over the next three years including energy costs, pay reward, income and multi-year cost pressures. This could inform the Government of future cost concerns. **Action.**

It was resolved to:

Note and comment on the report.

23.a) Dedicated Schools Grant (Safety Valve) and Financial Management

The Schools Forum received a report on the financial context for and consequences of the high needs block deficit and the way forward in the context of the DfE safety valve programme. The high needs block deficit was

in excess £39m and the service expected that spending would continue to exceed income. This deficit was housed in a negative reserve not seen elsewhere in the Council budget and the legality of which would expire in March 2023 without Government extension. The Department for Education had pressed councils to focus on delivering high needs blocks initiatives and the in-year balance for the Dedicated Schools Grant. The situation in Cambridgeshire was similar nationwide and elsewhere multi-year plans were being modelled with Safety Valve deals. The Council would also develop a multi-year plan, but would require national funding support.

Members noted that the increase in Education, Health and Care Plans [EHCP] was national, although modelling showed that over the past seven years Cambridgeshire's trajectory was stronger. The safety valve process aimed to meet this demand through early intervention. An additional Schools Forum would be arranged to discuss this. **Action.**

It was resolved to:

Note and comment on the contents of the report.

23.b) High Needs Block and Safety Valve Update – July 2022

A slide pack for the report which was shared with the Schools Forum and the Schools Forum Working Group could be found on the Council website, [here](#). The officer highlighted that, nationally, three quarters of local authorities had a high needs block deficit. Cambridgeshire's response to this was similar to other successful local authorities, although high demand for educational psychologists able to perform statutory assessments remained a problem. The service's safety valve proposals aimed at early intervention and prevention using fourteen workstreams, such as multiagency panels, in which the Schools Forum were encouraged to be involved.

Individual members raised the following points with regard to the slides:

- Clarified that implementation of the SEND transformation would need to occur prior the Green Paper becoming legislation. Once implemented, it would provide positive foundations for service work through a banding system, EHCP template and case management system.
- Noted that placement provision was challenged by geography. In addition to Enhanced Resource Base places, the Council had invested £60m into the creation of 750-800 places for enhanced provision which would accommodate the 210 children currently requiring specialist placements. These additional placements, including the potential development of a free school, would reduce costs on the service from out of county placements and private tuition.
- Confirmed that the SEND for Change Group comprised of individuals with previous experience and backgrounds working in finance and as Head

Teachers. They had met weekly for eight weeks and a paper would be brought to the Schools Forum in autumn detailing the group's work.

The presentation continued to state that, in order for the Department for Education to meet the high needs deficit in Cambridgeshire, the Council would be required to submit an outline proposal for budget balancing to the DfE. This proposal would include a short-term deficit increase, followed by a long-term decrease; modelling for mitigating any negative impact on children will be reviewed in autumn. Significant changes resulting from the budget review had been identified for consideration, including a multi-year block transfer.

Individual members raised the following points with regard to the slides:

- Clarified that a multi-year block transfer above 0.5% would need to be agreed by the Secretary of State. If this was approved and following consultation with the Schools Forum, a 1% increase was possible.
- Agreed that the reduction in EHCP applications listed in the Green Paper had caused parental concerns. If implemented, the service would focus on offering provision and support for parents, especially in early years.

It was resolved to:

Note and comment on the contents of the report.

25. Schools Funding Formula Update – July 2022

The Schools Forum received a report for which there was a slide pack, as can be found on the Council website, [here](#). It included details on: block transfer impacts; the planned review of the Indicative SEND budget; consideration of growth funding by the Department for Education (in Cambridgeshire current funding did not meet basic need); premises funding; changes to distance eligibility; the minimum funding guarantee; a transition timeline; and current and proposed legislation.

It was resolved to:

Comment on the content of the presentation at appendix A.

26. Agenda Plan

It was resolved to:

Note the agenda plan.

27. Any Other Business

The Director for Education clarified that local authorities had discretion on the application methods for supplementary funding. Following consultation with providers, it was agreed there would be £125 per commissioned place for special schools and there would be further consideration on the funding for Alternative Provision APs and unsettled.

An additional meeting was proposed for 30 September 2022 to discuss the high needs block and safety valve funding.

The scheme for the high needs contingency budget would be reviewed in November, but currently included: a 0.5% transfer for schools with an exceptionally high proportion of children requiring EHCPs relative to the notional SEND budget (this was calculated by comparing 80% of the school's notional SEND figure (it was estimated the other 20% would be spent on children without EHCPs)); representation of schools housing children from out-of-area; and consultation with schools with high balances regarding the reallocation of budget prior to allocations.

Chairman