

CAMBRIDGESHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM: MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING

Date: 25th February 2020

Time: 14:30 p.m. – 16.04 p.m.

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

Present:	<u>Maintained Primary</u>	Liz Bassett Tony Davies Sasha Howard Guy Underwood
	<u>Academy Primary</u>	Susannah Connell
	<u>Academy Alternative Provision</u>	Nick Morley
	<u>Other Academy Appointments</u>	Christopher Bennet Jonathan Culpin Ryan Kellsall John King James Robertson (Substituting for Patsy Peres)
	<u>Maintained Pupil Referral Unit</u>	Amanda Morris-Drake
	<u>Early Years Reference Group</u>	Deborah Parfitt
	<u>Post 16 Further Education</u>	Jeremy Lloyd
	<u>Maintained Special School</u>	Lucie Calow
	<u>Academy Special School</u>	Dr Kim Taylor OBE
	<u>Cambridgeshire County Council</u>	Councillor Simon Bywater Councillor Peter Downes
	<u>Observers</u>	Jon Duveen (Teachers Unions) Joe McCrossan (Diocese of East Anglia)
	<u>Officers</u>	G, Arnold (Until 14:40 p.m.) J Lewis, R Sanderson, M Wade, J Veitch
	<u>Also In attendance</u>	Joanne Hardwick (Maintained Special School)
Apologies:	<u>Maintained Secondary</u>	Carole Moss
	<u>Academy Board Member</u>	Philip Hodgson (Chairman)
	<u>Other Academy Appointments</u>	Patsy Peres (Substituted by James Robertson) Richard Spencer
	<u>Maintained Nursery School</u>	Rikke Waldau

Maintained Governor

Paul Stratford

Cambridgeshire County Council

Councillor Joan Whitehead (CCC)

Observers

Andrew Read (Diocese of East Anglia)
Rob Turner

Absent:

Other Academy Appointments

Adrian Ball

144. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN/CHAIRWOMEN FOR THE MEETING

As the Chairman, Philip Hodgson was unable to attend the meeting and the vacant Vice Chairman position had not yet been filled, there was a need to appoint a temporary Chairman / woman to chair the meeting.

It was proposed and seconded that Jonathan Culpin be appointed as Chairman of Schools Forum for this special meeting.

Forum agreed unanimously:

To appoint Jonathan Culpin as the Chairman for the meeting.

145. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were as set out above.

There were no declarations of interest.

146. SCHOOLS FORUM MINUTES – 17TH JANUARY 2020

Subject to the following amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 17th January 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

- Page 7 – 6th bullet point – “Reminded Officers that at the last meeting, all Forum member had agreed that they would not support a 1.8% transfer” should read “Reminded Officers that at the last meeting, **the majority of** Forum members had agreed that they would not support a 1.8% transfer”.

147. ACTION LOG

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

- Minute 87 – High Needs Block Funding – The Challenges for Cambridgeshire – The Service Director, Education informed Forum that this was progressing and that Officers would be able to provide more information at a future meeting.
- Minute 120 – Review of Maintained Nurseries – The Service Director, Education stated that a review of maintained nursery school funding was ongoing and that Officers were still waiting for further Central Government announcements to be made.

148. EARLY YEARS NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA 2020-21 INCLUDING NURSERY SCHOOLS

Schools Forum considered a report providing an update on the latest local Early Years funding formula proposals for 2020/21. The Early Years Development and Funding Manager drew Forum's attention to the information found within the report. It was highlighted that in October 2019 the Department for Education (DfE) announced an increase in the hourly rate paid to Cambridgeshire for 2020/21 of 8p per hour, from £4.42 to £4.50. This increase in funding had given Cambridgeshire the flexibility to propose an increase to the 3- and 4- year old base rate of funding to providers of 9p an hour, from £4.05 to £4.14.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report and to approve the planned Centrally Retained amounts for 2020/21 as set out in section 2.4 as follows: £633,187k for Early Years statutory duties, £375k for Early Years and Childcare Qualifications, £88,355 for EY Accelerating the achievement of vulnerable groups, £11k for Early Years Pupil Premium Eligibility and £60k for Special Education Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) coordination and administration.

149. SCHOOLS FUNDING UPDATE – FEBRUARY 2020

At the previous meeting of Schools Forum on the 17th January 2020, it was agreed to uphold the decision made by Forum on the 18th December 2019 to approve a 0% block transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. However, a 0.5% transfer could be reconsidered subject to the Secretary of State's decision not to approve the 1.8% transfer. Following on from this, at the Children and Young People (CYP) Committee meeting on the 21st January 2020, it was agreed to seek the Secretary of State's approval to a transfer of 1.8% as the Local Authority were not minded to endorse the decision of Schools Forum. The Committee also agreed that should the Secretary of State not approve the Local Authority's (LA) request of a 1.8% transfer, then Schools Forum would be asked to reconsider a transfer of 0.5%. The Service Director, Education informed Forum that on the 11th February 2020 the Local Authority (LA) had received notification that the disapplication request to transfer 1.8% of the Schools Block to support High Needs pressures had been declined by the Secretary of State. Therefore this Special meeting of Cambridgeshire Schools Forum had been called in order to reconsider a block transfer of 0.5%/1.85m from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.

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 Forum's attention to the 2020/21 Schools Funding Update, Illustrative Funding Data Scenarios – 2020/21 and the Primary and Secondary Schools Budgets – 2020/21. (Attached as Appendix 1, 2 and 3 to these minutes).

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to Appendix 1, 2 and 3.

- asked whether Officers, due to the proposed reduction in Behaviour and Attendance Improvement Partnership (BAIP) funding, needed to model the financial impacts caused by an potential increase in permanent exclusions. The Service Director, Education was unclear as to whether Officers could do this. He explained that the LA were in a difficult financial position and that they had been

directed by the Secretary of State to implement cuts in funding for high needs provision. He commented that the LA could see a significant increase in the current deficit depending on the decision made by Forum.

- raised concerns regarding the reduction of top up funding for mainstream schools, units and special schools and suggested that this would create larger financial problems in the future which would ultimately lead to less educational provision being provided to children in Cambridgeshire.
- queried whether the LA would have to propose even greater savings measures in the future. The Service Director, Education commented that Officers were proposing these savings in order to create financial stability. He informed Forum that the new national funding formula had been delayed until the 2022/23 financial year. Officers were hoping that the Department for Education's (DfE's) review of the funding allocated to Special Educational Needs (SEN) would help address the issues that had caused the LA's deficit such as the ability to access the Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) system and the funding allocated to 19-25 year olds.
- reminded Forum that the School Funding Consultation 2020/21 survey results indicated that 54% of respondents had agreed with the idea that the LA propose a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block (HNB) to support the High Needs budget in 2020-21.
- The Academy Special Schools representative suggested that a 0.5% transfer would help support vulnerable children in the mainstream sector. Without this transfer, it was suggested that there would be severe reductions made to the delivery of education provision. She reminded Forum that children with SEN were found in all education sectors. She commented that EHCPs provided children with SEN with an opportunity for an education. She stated that they could not move to a system where schools only provided educational provision to the most able children.
- A member supporting a 0.5% transfer explained that there was already significant pressure on primary and secondary schools. He stressed that there were currently no placements available for children with severe SEN in Cambridge City. A further comment made another member stated that without the financial support given to schools by the LA then education provision would deteriorate.
- explained that the majority of Cambridgeshire Primary Heads (CPH) Representatives did not support a 0.5% transfer, as the cuts being proposed would take place regardless of a transfer. He suggested that a 0.5% transfer would make the balance sheet appear slightly better at the start of the financial year. The CPH representatives believed that the deficit reduction plan involved schools taking more responsibilities for education provision which would lead to greater financial cost. The majority of CPH representatives also believed it would be beneficial to keep the money in the schools so it did not disappear into the deficit.
- queried the maximum overspend the LA could incur. The Service Director, Education informed Forum that currently the LA were facing significant cash flow issues, it was costing £500k a year to borrow the money needed to fund the

current schools budget. He reminded Forum that the LA had a statutory obligation to financially support schools, but that this level of borrowing could not be sustained.

- The Chairman of the Children and Young People (CYP) Committee informed Forum that the LA were facing a number of other financial pressures. He commented that the current debate was identical to the one that had taken place at CYP Committee.
- sought more information regarding how the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) account and HNB would be brought into balance. The Service Director, Education clarified that due to most recent government consultation, the LA could no longer put money into or take money out of the HNB without the approval of the Secretary of State. He commented that HNB funding was now ring-fenced within the DSG.
- queried how the LA would sustain the funding allocated to the HNB. The Service Director, Education confirmed that funding would have to be found from within the DSG. He suggested that if Forum did not approve the 0.5% transfer at the current meeting then they were only deferring a decision that would ultimately have to be taken at a later date.
- commented that Forum, County Councillors and Parents needed to be made aware of the serious financial position the LA was in.
- requested clarification regarding the financial implications of a 0% transfer. The Service Director, Education stated that a difficult decision would have to be taken around the funding allocated to special schools. Officers had spoken to the DfE regarding the level of service cuts required to achieve financial sustainability.
- reminded Forum members that the current deficit impacted all sectors of the education system within Cambridgeshire. She also reminded Forum that without special school provision, the SEN children would be attending mainstream schools.
- believed that Central Government and the inadequacies of the national funding formula had been responsible for the current deficit found within Cambridgeshire. She stressed that there was now not enough money in Cambridgeshire to support the needs of children with SEN. She suggested that the deficit should be kept in one place to show Government the severity of Cambridgeshire's financial situation.
- argued that service cuts would only reduce the deficit artificially, by implementing these cuts, the LA would disguise their 'need to spend' at the point where the DfE were using this 'need to spend' to assist with their review of the funding formula for high needs. He suggested that the right approach for this decision could be to defer it for 12 months so the LA could highlight their full expenditure to the DfE.
- commented that the deficit would still be present no matter the decision made by Forum. She believed that at the end of the financial year they would be facing an

even greater deficit. She stated that by not supporting the LA, educational services would erode.

- queried the financial implications a 0.5% transfer would have. The Service Director, Education confirmed that it would help achieve financial balance in year.
- sought more information regarding the implications of a 0.5%/1.85m transfer and how the LA would identify the further savings required to balance the budget. The Service Director, Education explained that the recovery plan identified a number of streams that would create further savings. He suggested that a 0.5% transfer would mean that the LA could reduce the amount of proposed cuts.

In further discussion, individuals raised the following issues in relation to the recommendation to approve the submission of a disapplication request to reduce the Special Schools Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to minus 5%:

- commented that approval of this recommendation would only affect one particular sector of the education system.
- sought more information regarding the suggestion that this recommendation would penalised one education sector. It was clarified that special schools could go below the 5% MFG if this recommendation was agreed.
- stressed that children with SEN required significant levels of support.
- asked whether approval of this would lead to a minus 5% reduction in MFG for special schools and a reduction in special top up. The Service Director, Education clarified that this was not the case, he confirmed that the LA were not proposing a cut across the general top up. He agreed that the wording in the report could be clearer.
- explained that if a certain level of financial support was not given to special schools, then the provision they could provide would be reduced and therefore SEN placements could not be maintained,
- raised concerns regarding the fact that if this recommendation was approved then it would set a dangerous precedent going forwards as it was only being applied to one educational sector. She commented that the implications of the cuts were unknown. In reference to a Government publication, she requested that this decision be deferred until a future meeting, once the result of the banding changes were known.
- queried whether this recommendation needed the agreement of both Forum and Special Schools. It was confirmed that this was the case.

Following queries raised by Forum members regarding the proposed minus 5% reduction in MFG, the Service Director, Education confirmed that the LA could only reduce special schools top up funding with the agreement of Forum.

It was resolved to:

- a) Not approve a block transfer of 0.5% / 1.85m from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.**
- b) Not approve a submission of a disapplication request to reduce the Special School Minimum Funding Guarantee to minus 5%**

Following the decision, the Academy Special Schools representative explained that the LA had absorbed a number of cuts in the last 10 years and were now not in a position to absorb anymore. She suggested that if the proposed 5% reduction to special school MFG was agreed, it would have reduced the educational provision being provided by special schools. The Service Director, Education reiterated the fact that this had been a difficult decision. He expressed his support for special schools and raised concerns that the 5% reduction to per-pupil funding for special schools would have been significant, if implemented.

150. PROPOSED FUTURE SCHOOLS FORUM DATES FOR JANUARY 2021 AND MARCH 2021

Forum considered a report outlining the proposed future Schools Forum meeting dates in January and March 2021.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Confirm Friday 15th January 2021 as the date for the January 2021 Forum.
- b) Agree Wednesday 24th March 2021 as the date for the March 2021 Forum.

151. SCHOOLS FORUM AGENDA PLAN – FEBRUARY 2020

It was resolved to:

Note the agenda plan with the following updates:

- Appointment of a new Vice-Chairman/women to be made at the Schools Forum meeting on the 27th March 2020. (*Note this meeting was subsequently cancelled due to the Covid-19 Pandemic crisis*)

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled Cambridgeshire Schools Forum was on Friday 15th May 2020 at 10:00 am in the Kreis Viersen, Shire Hall, Cambridge.

Chairman
17th July 2020