

CAMBRIDGESHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM: MINUTES

Date: 22 May 2015

Time: 10.00am – 12.00pm

Place: Kreis Viersen Room, Shire Hall, Cambridge

Present: P Hodgson (Chairman), S Connell, N Jones, A Kent, J McCrossan, L Murphy, K Rains, A Rodger (Vice-Chairman), K Taylor, R Waldau and M Woods

Observers

Councillor P Downes

G Fewtrell

J Patterson

Cambridgeshire County Council

Teachers' Unions

Ely Diocese Church of England

Officers

C Malyon (item 96 only), J Davies, S Ferguson (item 97 only), C Gregoire (item 98 only), K Grimwade, S Heywood, S Howarth, H Phelan (item 97 only), M Teasdale, M Wade and K John

Apologies: S Blyth, J Culpin, A Day, T Davies, K Evans, Cllr D Harty, S Livesey, A Reeder and Cllr J Whitehead,

Apology for late arrival: M Woods

ACTION

90. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN/WOMAN

Philip Hodgson was appointed Chairman for the municipal year 2015-16

91. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN/WOMAN

Alan Rodger was appointed Vice-Chairman for the municipal year 2015-16.

92. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The following matters arising were discussed:

- (a) **Minute 82: Minutes – Minute 73, Schools funding reform:**
Referring to the recent change in Government, Cllr Downes reported on his understanding that it was still the intention of the Department for Education (DfE) to proceed with a national funding formula for schools. Martin Wade confirmed that this was also his understanding. He further reported that Susan Acland-Hood had left the DfE and that the relevant contact officer was now Tony Foot. The F40 Group hoped to arrange a meeting with Mr Foot in mid-June.

With respect to the action in the minute to organise a meeting for prospective parliamentary candidates, the Chairman reported that such a meeting had taken place in Swavesey on 24 March 2015. Unfortunately the meeting had not been well attended with only around ten candidates present, of whom Heidi Allen and Lucy Frazer had been elected. Both candidates had however expressed concern at the level of school funding in Cambridgeshire.

It was understood that after the election Heidi Allen MP had expressed interest in meeting with other MPs and interested parties to discuss school funding in the County.

It was suggested that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman should seek to arrange a meeting with local MPs and that Headteachers representing each phase should also be invited to attend. Action: Chairman

P Hodgson

(b) Minute 82: Minutes – Minute 75, Growth Fund and falling Rolls Criteria 2015/16

Martin Wade confirmed that he had raised this issue with the DfE.

(c) Minute 83: Schools Budget 2015/16 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

The Forum noted that the information requested at the previous meeting had been attached as Appendix A to the minutes.

It was also confirmed that arrangements were in hand to set up the meeting to discuss supporting the additional administrative demands relating to complex needs students as outlined in the minute.

**M Teasdale/
J Davies**

An item relating to the financial health of schools was included on the agenda for this meeting, as requested in the minute.

(c) Minute 85: Special Educational Needs (SEND) Commissioning Strategy Update on Next Steps

It was confirmed that all actions identified in this minute had been completed.

93. SCHOOLS BUDGET 2015/16: DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) UPDATE

The Schools Finance Manager presented an update on the estimated DSG to be received in 2015/16 and a summary of the recently published “Analysis of local authorities’ school block funding formulae”. In introducing the report, the Schools Finance Manager highlighted the following points:-

- The total estimated DFG was just under £410m. This did not include the 2-year old funding allocation. The Education Funding Agency (EFA) would notify the Local Authority of this allocation in June. It was anticipated this funding would be in the region of £3m.
- The report contained a link so that Forum members could access the Section 251 budget statement submitted to the DfE.
- The EFA provided comparative data regarding local authorities' block funding formulae which could be accessed via a link in the report.
- The percentage of overall funding allocated to Cambridgeshire schools via the deprivation factor was lower than the national average and statistical neighbours, but still targeted over £11.2m to individual schools.
- Rates were recycled back through the system. Whilst rates were not a cost to individual schools, they were a cost to the overall budget envelope. Cambridgeshire paid a larger proportion of its total funding through rates than average and there was a concern at the year-on-year increase in rates arising from revaluations of school premises and the removal of discretionary rate relief. This impacted on remaining funding for the basic entitlement.
- Cambridgeshire's Primary/Secondary ratio was 1:1.26. The Forum was however reminded that the number of small primary schools in the County skewed the figures slightly in favour of the primary sector.

During discussion upon the report:-

- Information was sought regarding non-recoupment academy adjustments. In response it was explained that for non recoupment academies funding was not included in the DSG. For example, certain new free schools, such as Cambourne Village College and the University Technical College, Cambridge, had previously been outside the Local Authority's formula, but were now part of that formula.
- It was suggested that it would be helpful to the Primary/ Secondary ratio if the differential could be calculated discounting the cost of examination entries.

It was resolved to note the report.

94. MAINTAINED SCHOOLS AND DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) FINANCIAL HEALTH

Further to minute 83, the Schools Finance Manager submitted a report which presented an analysis of the 2014/15 final closing balance

position of maintained schools and the overall DSG as at 31st March 2015. It was noted that the figures were based on the final year-end returns from schools but might vary slightly following further validation of the Consistent Financial Reporting returns.

The Schools Finance Manager introduced the report drawing attention to the following key points:

- The table at paragraph 2.1 indicated a reduction in the overall balances from £14.4m at 31st March 2014 (amended for in-year academy conversions) to £13.1 million at 31st March 2015.
- A list of maintained school revenue balances was set out at Appendix 1 to the report. The change in individual school balances could be attributed to a number of reasons (eg: delaying or cancelling spending decisions due to uncertainty around future funding, capitalising revenue funding to meet capital costs and using balances in order to meet the current budget.)
- There were 8 schools with a deficit revenue balance. This was a similar level to previous years and most deficits were below £10,000.
- The table at paragraph 2.5 set out the number of schools that had an excessive balance, using the revised criteria agreed by the Forum in 2011.
- There were four outstanding Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) returns at the date of the meeting. SFVS would not be externally assessed, rather the Local Authority would use schools' SFVS returns to inform the programme of financial assessment and audit.
- £0.7m of the £1.5m underspend in respect of funded 2 year old places had been used to meet pressures on 3 and 4 year old places. However 2014-15 was the final year that 2-year old funding would be based on predicted numbers and anticipated trajectory, with the amount for 2015-16 being based on actual take up. There would therefore be no recurring underspend. An element of the DSG carry forward would be used to fund the continued roll out of the 2-year old programme, together with offsetting any further pressures on DSG funded activities.
- It was intended to bring regular updates on DSG funded activities to future meetings of the Forum.

During discussion:

- Surprise was expressed that some schools were setting deficit budgets. In response it was explained that all of the schools either had historic deficits or had not benefited from a funding uplift in 2015/16 (either because they were special schools, or

because they had not benefitted from fairer funding due to historically high levels of Minimum Funding Guarantee).

- In response to a question as to measures taken by the Local Authority to challenge school financial management, it was reported that the Schools Intervention Service and Supported Finance team worked with schools on a one to one basis. Additionally, any school below the education floor targets was required to have a recovery plan and would be supported and monitored by the Local Authority. The Local Authority could ultimately claw back funding but had not had cause to do so thus far.
- Whilst welcoming the apparent reduction in the level of surpluses in the Primary sector, it was not felt to be appropriate for some schools to continue to maintain large surpluses. More scrutiny was called for in this area.
- It was acknowledged that more and more schools appeared to be calling upon balances.
- Reference was made to the increase in take up of Free School Meals and it was confirmed that officers were aware of the impact of this.
- Concern was expressed that the Schools Forum did not receive information regarding the revenue balances of academies. It was suggested that the Chair should write to the EFA on behalf of the Schools Forum to request information on the balances of academies for the last three years in order to enable the Forum to assess the direction of travel and better inform future decision making. In response to a suggestion that the information should first be sought from the academies themselves, it was reported that this information had previously been requested and had been received from about half of all primary and secondary schools. The Forum was informed that the information was published by the EFA, but not until about two years after year end. The Forum was also cautioned that owing to the format of academy accounts it was not possible to compare like with like with maintained schools.
- Members of the Forum reflected on the importance of school governors receiving financial information in a timely manner. In view of the accountability of governors, it was suggested that the Local Authority should ensure that appropriate financial information was sent to school governors, in addition to the school management. In response, it was noted that consideration had been given to sending information directly to governors, but there were issues in terms of accessing the appropriate database of governors' contact details. **Following further discussion it was agreed that those Forum members who served on the Governor Advisory Group should raise this issue at the**

**Governors'
representatives**

Group with a view to ensuring that governors received appropriate and timely communication concerning financial matters affecting their school.

It was resolved to note the contents of the report.

95. CAMBRIDGESHIRE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT BOARD

The Service Director, Learning, reported verbally on a proposal to establish a Cambridgeshire School Improvement Board. The aim of the proposal was to address the potential weaknesses of the current increasingly fractured school improvement landscape and to build on the County's successes, such as the Teaching School Alliances. A task and finish group comprising key stakeholders from all sectors had met to develop the proposals and had concluded that it wished to achieve a school improvement system that brought the whole system together, preventing further fracturing; was led by schools themselves; built on current successes and was a key factor in delivering the change Cambridgeshire needed.

Feedback from the spring term discussions had been positive but there was a reluctance to pursue the "company" model adopted by some other authorities, in view of the inherent risk involved. Instead there was a strong preference for a School Improvement Board to be set up whose governance would be underpinned by terms of reference agreed by all stakeholders.

Consultation was now taking place upon the proposal to establish a Schools Improvement Board from September 2015 and a copy of a letter sent to Headteachers, Principals and Chairs of Governors of all Cambridgeshire Schools had been circulated with the agenda.

The Service Director, Learning, reported verbally that at the same time as work had proceeded on developing the Cambridgeshire School Improvement Board, Tim Coulson, the Regional Schools Commissioner for the East of England, had been considering the establishment of a Secondary Academies Improvement Board. However, it had been recognised that it would be important to align the work of the Boards and to minimise any potential duplication.

The Service Director explained that the Cambridgeshire School Improvement Board (CSIB) would be school-led; inclusive of a wide range of stakeholders and designed for the long term. The Secondary Academies Improvement Board (SAIB) would be DfE led; secondary only and designed to address the current difficulties in the secondary phase, with a life span of probably three to four terms. All secondary heads and chairs of governors would be invited to the Board, but not wider stakeholders.

It was noted that there were areas of overlap for secondary schools around brokering school to school support, bidding to the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) for deployment funds, ensuring professional challenge from peers (Triad project), quality

assuring support/evaluating impact. Following discussions with the Regional Schools Commissioner, it had been agreed that for the life of the SAIB it would lead on these for the secondary phase, while CSIB would lead on these for primary and cross phase. The Regional Schools Commissioner would sit on the CSIB and the Service Director, Learning, would sit on the SAIB to ensure that this happened. When the SAIB completed its work these functions would revert to the CSIB.

There were things that the CSIB would do that the SAIB would not do, for all phases, e.g. agree form and content of Local Authority Keeping in Touch visits (KITs), make decisions about the allocation of Local Authority funds for accelerating achievement, communicate effective practice and steer collective activity on recruitment and retention (although SAIB might be involved with the latter if it added value).

During discussion:

- The concept of a Cambridgeshire School Improvement Board was welcomed.
- Some concern was expressed that the establishment of the SAIB might result in that Board becoming the key focus of the secondary phase, to the detriment of cross phase working on the CSIB.
- In response to the comment above, the Service Director, Learning, referred to his understanding that the secondary phase was supportive of continuing to work cross sector.
- A secondary representative on the Forum confirmed his expectation that the secondary sector would wish to continue to work in partnership, cross sector and emphasised the importance of shared learning cross sector.
- Concern was expressed that no representative of the special school sector was included in the membership of the SAIB and reference was made to the importance of inclusion in driving forward improvement. Another member noted that there did not appear to be any representation from Multi Academy Trusts on the Board.
- In response to a question regarding the financial implications of establishing the CSIB, it was confirmed that there was no new money to support the initiative. However, it might be possible to bid for funding.
- Reference was made to the importance of schools taking a collaborative, rather than competitive approach.

It was resolved to note the report.

96. CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL FINANCE SERVICE

The Head of Finance reported verbally on a proposed consultation in respect of proposals for the Professional Finance Service. An extract of the consultation document had been circulated with the agenda. It was noted that the consultation closed on 5 June 2015.

It was reported that as part of the LGSS Strategic plan, a savings target had been set for the Finance Directorate of £630,000 over a three year period. The Head of Finance outlined proposed changes in respect of strategic support and traded services. Specifically, reference was made to proposals to introduce a converged Schools Finance team operating across Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire to deliver schools finance, corporate schools finance and the traded services within those teams. It was intended that the proposals would not diminish the traded element of the support provided to schools but would actually result in a broader range of services being made available. The Head of Finance indicated that, in response to comments received thus far in the consultation, it had already been agreed to reinstate some resources in the traded element of the service.

During the ensuing discussion, members of the Forum expressed concern at the proposals. It was emphasised that the Forum had to date received high quality professional financial advice and that this was essential for the successful operation of the Forum. Reservations also were expressed at the proposal for a converged service with Northamptonshire, with reference being made to the perceived differences in ways of working between the authorities. Forum members also commented that they did not have sufficient information on which to make a judgment, particularly around the new roles and the impact of the proposals on schools. In that context, it was suggested that an impact assessment should be provided upon the proposals to enable an informed response to the consultation.

In response to the comments of Forum members, the Head of Finance highlighted that all comments received from the consultation exercise would be reviewed seriously. This could result in the proposals being refined, reduced or removed. The Head of Finance did however re-iterate that the savings target had to be found from within the service and therefore any reduction in savings in one area had to be found elsewhere.

Having listened to the debate, the Chairman concluded that there was insufficient information available at the meeting to enable the Forum to submit a considered response to the consultation. **It was accordingly agreed that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, together with a representative from each Headteachers' Group, should meet with the Head of Finance to discuss the proposals in more detail.**
Action: Chairman/Vice-Chairman/Head of Finance.

**P Hodgson/
A Rodger/
C Malyon**

97. MEETING THE NEEDS OF PRIMARY AGED CHILDREN WITH BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

The report of the Head of SEND Specialist Service/Principal Educational Psychologist was submitted which requested the Schools Forum to approve funding from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to support primary aged children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

It was noted in the report that an increasing number of primary aged children were at risk of exclusion or had been permanently excluded from school. In comparison to other authorities, Cambridgeshire had a higher percentage of children identified with SEMH. There were considerable pressures on schools and support services to meet the needs of these children. The report recommended ways forward to address these concerns, including the provision of a package of support for children who had complex and high levels of need in relation to school emotional and mental health needs. In particular, paragraph 9.1 outlined system wide changes needed at universal and targeted levels of intervention, whilst paragraph 9.2 detailed proposals for development of a therapeutic provision. It was noted that the proposals presented took account of discussion at Cambridgeshire Primary Heads (CPH) Inclusion and feedback from CPH representatives. There would be an evaluation of the impact of the provision in April 2016, with regular reporting of progress to CPH on a half termly basis.

The costs required to implement the proposals were detailed in paragraph 10 of the report and the Schools Finance Manager confirmed that the costs involved could be met from the £4.5m DSG carry forward.

During discussion upon the report:

- Noting that one off funding was being sought for the proposals, information was sought regarding the longer term viability of the initiative. In response, it was reported that discussions had already taken place with partners around how the support might be continued in the future.
- It was suggested that the scope for seeking funding from the Together for Families programme could be investigated.
- Reference also was made to the importance of aligning the proposals with the work of social care.

It was resolved to approve the allocation of £469,481 from the DSG carry forward, on a one off basis, to support primary aged children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs as set out in the submitted report, pending evaluation of the proposed provision in South Cambs, the City, East Cambs and Fenland areas and a countywide training programme for teaching assistants and for parents/carers.

98. SCHOOLS, COUNTY COUNCIL FUNDING, EMERGENCY REPLACEMENTS AND THE ENERGY PERFORMANCE CONTRACTING PROGRAMME

The report of the Project Manager, Mobilising Local Energy Investment, was submitted which :

- Set out the steps which should initially be followed by Head Teachers of maintained schools in respect of funding school maintenance;
- Explained that only once the funding avenues referred to in the report had been exhausted could a school apply to the Local Authority for capital support funding, with priority investment projects including boiler replacement, boiler control replacements and roof or window replacements;
- Outlined procedures for dealing with emergencies, whilst emphasising the importance of planned maintenance and early replacement of equipment;
- Provided details of the Mobilising Local Energy Investment Programme which was installing energy measures under an Energy Performance Contract (EnPC) in schools. It was noted that an EnPC, through its energy savings, provided sufficient funds to pay back capital investment and accrue financial benefit over time; and
- Advised that LGSS distributed a Good Stewardship Guide to schools to support Head Teachers and Governors in providing good stewardship of their school premises. Content on the EnPC programme would be included in the next draft of the guide.

The next steps and timescale with regard to further development of EnPC programme were set out in paragraph 3 of the report.

During discussion, concern was expressed that schools had limited capital to meet maintenance needs and did not have the necessary resources to take out loans. In response, it was reported that every effort was made to adjust the scope of the work to make the maintenance as cost effective as possible.

It was resolved to note the report

99. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEND) WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

It was agreed to defer this item to the next meeting of the Forum.

**M Teasdale/
Democratic
Services**

100. FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan was noted.

**101. ASSESSMENT FROM SUB-GROUP MEETINGS AND FEEDBACK
FROM HEAD TEACHERS' STEERING GROUPS**

There were no updates.

102. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting would be held on Friday 3rd July 2015.

It was noted that the agenda contained an incorrect date for the Forum's meeting in March 2016. The dates for future meetings of the Forum beyond July 2015 were confirmed as follows:

- 10 a.m. Friday 16th October 2015
- 10 a.m. Wednesday 16th December 2015
- 10 a.m. Friday 15th January 2016
- 10 a.m. Wednesday 16th March 2016
- 10 a.m. Friday 24th June 2016.

Chairman
16th October 2015