

Schools Forum – Minutes

Date: Friday 16 July 2021

Time: 10.00am – 10.45am

Venue: Virtual meeting in line with the Schools Forums (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 making provisions to enable schools forums to meet remotely while they are unable to meet physically in a room during the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID19)

Present:

Academy Primary - Susannah Connell

Academy Special School – Simon Bainbridge

Maintained Primary - Liz Bassett, Sasha Howard, and Guy Underwood

Maintained Nursery – Alex Pearson (Sub for Claire Palmer)

Maintained Special School - Joanne Hardwick

Maintained Pupil Referral Unit – Leah Miller

Maintained Governor - Paul Stratford (Vice-Chairman)

Other Academy Sector Appointments – Adrian Ball, Christopher Bennett, Ryan Kelsall, John King, Richard Spencer, and Patsy Peres

Cambridgeshire County Council - Councillor C Daunton and Councillor S Taylor.

Observers – Canon Andrew Read, Jon Duveen

Officers - Jonathan Lewis, Service Director Education, Tamar Oviatt-Ham – Democratic Services Officer, Monika Balazs – Democratic Services Assistant and Martin Wade, Strategic Finance Business Partner.

Apologies: Jon Culpin (Chairman), Joe McCrossan, Jeremy Lloyd, Claire Palmer and Deborah Parfitt

Quorum on current voting membership: 8

1. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies received from Jon Culpin, Joe McCrossan, Jeremy Lloyd, Claire Palmer and Deborah Parfitt.

No declarations of interest were made.

2. Schools Forum Minutes – 15 January 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January were approved as a correct record.

3. Minutes Action Log

The forum noted the minute action log.

4. Review of Membership and Proportionality 2021

The forum received a report that provided an overview of the latest position in respect of the forum's proportionality.

Members noted that there were no changes to the proportionality, and that vacant places would be filled in the Autumn term. The Service Director, Education explained that the proposals outlined in appendix two of the report for future Academy membership of Schools Forum, were taken to the CCEON meeting on 25th March 2021, with views sought ahead of the Schools Forum meeting. He clarified that the proposals would now be adopted and included in the Schools Forum Constitution.

There was a correction to the report regarding the Other Academy Appointments made by John King, who advised that he was the representative for the Aspire Learning Trust.

It was resolved to:

Note and comment on the current report.

5. School Balances& DSG Financial Health- July 2021

The forum considered a report that provided an update on the final closing balance position of maintained schools and the overall Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) as at 31st March 2021. The Strategic Finance Business Partner drew attention to the Maintained School Balances year on year figures, the Balance Claw-back mechanism, the financial difficulties of maintained schools, the Schools Financial Value Standards, and the Academy Balances survey.

Individual members raised questions in relation to the school balances and the Designated Schools Grant and sought clarification on:

- How a school that was previously in good financial health during the previous year was now in deficit and whether there was any budgetary training provided for schools? The Service Director Education explained that there could be a range of different circumstances, however it was likely due to low funding by the DSG or the fluctuations in student numbers. Budgetary trainings were held yearly to aid financial planning.
- How long a school could maintain a financial deficit before it would be amalgamated? The Service Director Education confirmed that there were currently no plans for any schools to merge. It was explained that poor funding, inflation, and cost pressures would cause budgetary deficits, and in these cases, schools would receive support from the Local Authority to address the situation.
- Whether the loss of external income would have any impact on schools' budgets? The Service Director Education confirmed that this could be one of the causes, however stressed that the main cause of the financial difficulty was the poor level of funding provided by the DfE.
- What percentage of schools were expected to go through reorganisation due to financial pressures in the next 3-5 years? The Service Director Education advised that this could not be estimated, as the numbers would depend on schools' individual circumstances. Members were advised that some schools already indicated that they plan to use their reserves to supplement their income.

The Service Director, Education provided a verbal update on the DSG position and advised the forum that a local authority response was being prepared to the Government's Consultation for the introduction of a National Hard Funding Formula 2024/25 onwards. Attention was drawn to the consultation which was only accessible from July 2021 and would be closed in September 2021. The Forum was encouraged to submit individual responses as it contained elements of Academy Funding as well.

It was resolved to:

Note and comment on the contents of the report.

6. High Needs Update

The Service Director, Education provided a verbal update on the current standing of the High Needs provision. It was highlighted that a briefing event would be held on the 15th September 2021 and the focus would be on getting services in the right place. The Recovery Plan would be submitted within the Safety Valve Fund provision around early August 2021 to resolve the deficit issue, however further information was awaited due to the lack of set process.

It was confirmed that very little change was expected to next year's Future Funding Formula, however additional subsidies could be obtained via Sparsity Funding for those schools fitting the qualifying criteria.

In discussion Members highlighted the punitive measures other local authorities experienced when using the Safety Valve Fund option. The Service Director Education confirmed that there were variable measures imposed upon to other local authorities by the DfE and assured the forum that the County Council was in constant contact with the DfE to seek guidance and achieve further savings.

It was resolved to:

Note the update.

7. Schools Forum Agenda Plan Update

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that there were no additions to the Forward Plan since publication. It was confirmed that a briefing before the budget setting meeting and the further consultation exercise was planned to take place during the Autumn.

It was resolved to:

Note the agenda plan.

Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that all meetings of the Schools Forum would be held virtually, except the Budget setting meeting taking place on Friday 5th November, which would be held in person with hybrid meeting provisions.

Chairman