

SCHOOLS FORUM: MINUTES

Date: Friday 6 November 2020

Time: 10.00am - 11.45am

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:

Maintained Primary Heads - Liz Bassett, Tony Davies (substitute for Sasha Howard) and Guy Underwood

Academy Primary - Susannah Connell

Other Academy Sector Appointments - Adrian Ball, Christopher Bennet , Jonathan Culpin (Chairman) , Ryan Kellsall, John King , Patsy Peres and Richard Spencer

Maintained Pupil Referral Unit – Leah Miller

Early Years Reference Group - Deborah Parfitt

Post 16 Further Education - Jeremy Lloyd

Maintained Governor - Paul Stratford (Vice-Chairman)

Maintained Nursery School - Claire Palmer

Maintained Special School - Joanne Hardwick

Academy Special School - Simon Bainbridge

Cambridgeshire County Council - Councillor Simon Bywater, Councillor Peter Downes and Councillor Simone Taylor

Observers - Jon Duveen (Teachers Unions), Julie Cornwall,) and Andrew Read (Diocese of East Anglia)

Officers - J Lewis, Service Director Education, T Oviatt-Ham – Democratic Services Officer, R Sanderson, Democratic Services Officer and Clerk to Forum and M Wade, Strategic Finance Business Partner.

Apologies:

Sasha Howard (Maintained Primary Head)

Joe Mc-Crossan (Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia)

Quorum on current voting membership: 8

162. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies received from Sasha Howard substituted by Tony Davies and Joe Mc-Crossan.

The Chairman welcomed Leah Miller representing the maintained pupil referral unit to her first meeting and Simon Bainbridge who, although in the past had been a substitute for Kim Taylor, was now the representative for academy special schools.

The Chairman informed the meeting of the resignation of the former Chairman Philip Hodgson, who had resigned from the Forum for personal reasons. On behalf of the Forum he wished him well for the future and asked Democratic Services to write on behalf of the Forum to express their deep gratitude for his years of service that he had provided to both Forum and to the children of the County in his tireless efforts, along with the previous Vice Chairman, the late Dr Alan Rodger, in lobbying for a better grant settlement for Cambridgeshire.

No declarations of interest were made.

163. Schools Forum Minutes - 17th July 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th July 2020 were approved as a correct record.

164. Minutes Action Log October 2020

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

- Minute 157: Update on High Needs Recovery Plan. The Service Director, Education explained this had moved on since the last meeting as he had now met with MPs. The suggestion was that rather than just Forum writing to Government requesting additional funding, a more effective course of action would be that a joint letter of representation should be sent.
- Minute 160: Review of Membership and Proportionality – need for more ethnic diversity in the Forum membership. The Service Director, Education stated that he would undertake a review of the Forum membership ahead of the next meeting and that he would ask that ethnicity and diversity be considered throughout the process.

165. Schools Funding Update Covering Report - November 2020

The Forum received a report providing them with an update on the latest national funding announcements and local funding formula proposals for 2021/22.

The Service Director, Education and the Strategic Finance Business Partner gave a joint presentation (attached at appendix 1 of the minutes) that provided information to support the 2021/22 Schools budget setting process and covered the following areas:

- 21/22 School Funding Arrangements
- High Needs Block
- Illustrative Budget Modelling
- Consultation Process & Results
- Centrally Retained Funding
- Growth Funding / New Schools
- Next Steps

2021/22 School Funding Arrangements

The Service Director, Education explained that Cambridgeshire had received the third lowest increase nationally for the High Needs Block. He clarified that a value for money report for Special Education Needs had just been released by Government which highlighted that there was insufficient funding. He informed the forum that there was an ongoing review of teams and structures and that a report on the saving would be brought to the next meeting of the forum.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the national funding announcement outlined in the presentation:

- sought clarity on how many primary schools received sparsity funding . The Strategic Finance Business Partner explained that currently 17 of the 57 Primary Schools under 150 pupils met the criteria for sparsity funding.
- queried if there was a reason why Cambridgeshire was lower down the list on the National Funding Formula (ranked 149). The Service Director, Education explained that Cambridgeshire did not hit the factors that increased the funding ranking and commented that growth was not properly represented in the formula.

Consultation Process and Responses

The Strategic Finance Business Partner clarified that the consultation process had taken place earlier this year and that there had been over 200 attendees at virtual consultation events with a total of 80 submissions received. He drew the forums attention to the detailed consultation responses in appendix two of the report. He highlighted that further information would be circulated to maintained schools on the Risk Protection Arrangements.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the consultation process and responses outlined in the presentation:

- Questioned how many schools the 80 responses represented and what percentage this was of all of the schools in Cambridgeshire. The Strategic Finance Business partner explained that some of the responses were from Academy Trusts so he would need to go back and review the figures and update Forum after the meeting.

(ACTION) After removing duplicates and allowing for the total number of schools represented by multi-academy trusts approximately 106 different schools were represented. The consultation was sent to 255 separate schools across Primary, Secondary and Special, so this figure equated to approximately 42%.
- Sought clarity on what the impact would be if there was no transfer and whether there would be a need to reduce Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) if there was a transfer. The Service Director, Education explained that if the transfer did not take place then it would make little impact on budgets. He stated that currently there was £28 million borrowing a year and this position could not be sustained going forwards. He expressed his concern that the government could deduct £28 million from the schools budget in the future.
- Queried whether the proportion and overall level of out of county provision for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) had changed. The Service Director, Education clarified that the provision had stayed the same but there had been an increase in need. He explained that he would provide data on this at the next meeting. **(ACTION)**
- Asked if there had been any contact with the Department for Education over the last few months regarding Special Educational Needs (SEN) funding. The Service Director, Education explained that he had met with the Right honourable Nick Gibb MP who had promised support and he had met with the Department of Education twice during the pandemic who had stated that the local authority's activity in this area was great, but that there had been nothing forthcoming in relation to funding. He stated that he had now written to the Department for Education four times regarding cash flow and that because of COVID they had stated that they had been unable to deal with the requests. He explained that there was also a new template for recording deficits and that most local authorities were recording a deficit. He highlighted surveys conducted by F40 and the Society of County Treasurers on High Needs Deficits. The Strategic Finance Business Partner explained that the deficits template focused on looking back over previous years and that there was a disconnect in the process. The Service Director, Education stated that he would organise another meeting with Rt. Hon Nick Gibb MP and that it may be appropriate for Jon Culpin to attend with Councillor Bywater. **(ACTION)**
- Questioned whether there would be potential to reduce top up funding and whether officers were mapping different scenarios. The Strategic

Finance Business Partner stated that a transfer would have a disproportional impact on smaller primary schools. The Service Director, Education stated that officers were mindful of the potential disproportional impact and that there was a need to review the scenarios using the new census data to ensure that any disproportional impact was mitigated.

- Requested an up to date list of carry forwards of budget from schools. The Director, Education stated that when accounts were published in January and the list would be updated. He highlighted that local authorities were not allowed to claw any balances back. A forum member stated that Academy Trusts were not allowed to put a deficit budget out and would typically have 10% of their total budget as reserves as they needed to be run in a financially sustainable manner. A Forum member highlighted that a high proportion of surpluses were ring-fenced for different reasons and this highlighted the underfunding. The Service Director, Education stated that he would circulate and updated the list in the New Year. (ACTION)
- Sought further detailed information on the actions the local authority was taking to reduce deficits as this would be important for forum members to understand in terms of reduced support to schools, when making a decision on whether to make a transfer. The Service Director, Education clarified that he would share further detail on the consultation on services at the next meeting. (ACTION)
- requested further detail on what a 10% reduction in Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) funding might look like. The Service Director, Education stated that the Enhanced Resource Base review had gone on for a long time and that the contract was out of date. He explained that there were representatives from the Forum working with officers on the review in order to save money and improve the quality of provision. The Service Director, Education explained that he would update the Forum on the progress of the review and look to reform some of the groups that had been set up.(ACTION)
- sought further clarity on the challenges and impacts of the sparsity criteria. The Service Director, Education explained that he would be setting up a meeting with the schools that this applied to, to undertake a review. (ACTION) The Chairman stated that it was not a question of convincing people, but more of a question if anyone could do anything about the funding situation, even if they agreed with

Concluding the debate the Service Director, Education explained that they would be feeding back on the outcome of this meeting to the Children and Young People's Committee next week and that officers would continue to develop the formula and share the information with forum. He stated that officers had not yet formed a view on whether the Committee should override

the forums decision and go to the Secretary of State and that officers needed to reflect on the alternatives.

De-Delegations

The Maintained Primary Heads explained that they had discussed and agreed the de-delegations collectively.

Central Schools Services Block

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the Central Schools Services Block outlined in the presentation:

- Queried what the contribution to children's services covered. The Service Director, Education explained that this covered the additional Educational Psychologists support and youth services. He clarified that he had produced a list of what the contribution covered last year and he would circulate this again for clarification. (ACTION)
- Questioned whether Educational Psychologists contribution should stay the same. The Director, Education stated the number of Educational Psychologists would stay the same with this reduction and that funding was slowly being replaced with core council funding.
- Sought clarity on what was happening with the provision of Early Intervention Family Workers. The Service Director, Education explained that this had only become part of his service recently and he intended to bring a report to Forum on how the resources would be dedicated going forward. (ACTION)
- Discussed broad-band costs. The Service Director, Education explained that there had been a couple of challenges on elements of broadband agreement in relation to filtering and officers were working to resolve any issues.

Growth Fund and New School Funding

Individual members raised the following points in relation to the Growth Fund and New Schools Funding outlined in the presentation:

- Questioned whether proposals were being brought forward from the Department for Education. The Service Director, Education reiterated that repeated representations had been made and that the impact on growth would be highlighted again in the MP letter. He stated that the wave 12 bid of a new school in Soham was being taken to the next meeting of the Children and Young's People's Committee as officers did not believe there was a basic need for a new school at this time.

- Stated that a clear approach was needed for funding free schools. A forum member stated that the local authority should not underwrite pupil numbers were it was agreed that there was no basic need.

It was resolved:

2021/22 School Funding Arrangements

1. to note and comment on the national funding announcements.

Consultation Process and Responses

2. to comment on the responses received to the consultation and the proposed Local Authority (LA) approach.

Schools Block and High Needs Block

3. Not to approve a block transfer between the Schools Block and the High Needs Block

De-Delegations

5. to approve the continuation of de-delegations in respect of:

- i) Contingency
- ii) Free School Meals Eligibility
- iii) Maternity
- iv) Trade Union Facilities Time

Central Schools Services Block

6. to approve:

- v) the reduction in Contribution to Children's Services from £1.5m to £1m for 2021/22.
- vi) the continuation of the £733k to support early intervention family workers.
- vii) the transfer of £1,085k from the Central Schools Service Block (CSSB) to the High Needs Block.
- viii) the continued use of the retained duties funding within the CSSB to support ongoing functions.
- ix) the continued retention of £10 per pupil from maintained schools for services specifically provided to maintained schools.

7. to comment on the proposal for Schools to be charged for 40% of the current Broadband costs following the further reduction in funding.

Growth Fund and New School Funding

8. to approve:

- x) the continuation of the current growth fund criteria and funding rates for 2021/22
- xi) the continuation of the centrally retained growth fund to £2m.
- xii) the variation to pupil numbers for new schools.
- xiii) the underwriting of pupil numbers for new schools in the future – subject to changes in national policy

166. Schools Forum Agenda Plan Update October 2020

The Forum noted the following reports on the agenda for the next Forum meeting on 16 December:

- Current membership and appointment 4 vacancies – diversity
- School funding updates all requests coming forward
- High Needs Recovery Plan

It was resolved to:

note the agenda plan.

Date of Next Meeting

The Cambridgeshire Schools Forum will meet next on Wednesday 16 December 2020 at 10am.

Chairman