

CAMBRIDGESHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM: MINUTES

Date: 10th December 2014

Time: 10.00 a.m. – 11.25 a.m.

Place: Kreis Viersen Room, Shire Hall, Cambridge

Present: D Barron, J Culpin, S Connell, A Day, C Derbyshire, K Evans, P Hodgson (Chairman), A Kent, J McCrossan, L Murphy, C Paskell (substituting for M Woods), A Rodger (Vice-Chairman), K Taylor and R Waldau

Observers

Cllr P Downes	Cambridgeshire County Council
G Fewtrell	Teachers' Unions
Cllr D Harty	Cambridgeshire County Council
S Livesey	Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

Officers

S Heywood, S Howarth, M Teasdale, M Wade and R Yule (Democratic Services)

Apologies: J Heathcote, N Jones, S Preston, A Reeder, J Russon and M Woods
Observers: Cllr J Whitehead

ACTION

73. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th October 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The following matters arising were discussed:

Minute 65, Schools funding reform: the Chairman reported on the meeting of the Forum Working Group on 28th November 2014 [notes of the meeting attached as Appendix A]. He expressed the group's gratitude to the Schools Finance Manager for much hard work in support of the group, both before and after the meeting.

Cllr Harty reported on a recent meeting of F40. Much of the time had been spent considering how to move forward on funding reform, bearing in mind the general election in May 2015; the short timescale was a major concern. A briefing session for MPs was likely to be held at Westminster in late February 2015. The Schools Finance Manager added that the F40 finance manager's research team had been looking at what a national funding formula might look like starting from scratch.

Minute 67, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

Commissioning Strategy: The Special School representative apologised for her absence from the previous meeting and expressed concern at the sufficiency of special school places given that there was huge growth in demand for places and no indication of extra funding. Forum noted that the outcome of the present consultation on the SEND commissioning strategy would be on the Forum's agenda for 16th January 2015.

Minute 69, Budget Planning / Capital Programme: speaking as the topic lead for finance on the Children and Young People (CYP) Committee, Cllr Downes reported that there had been a slight alleviation of the budget position for 2015/16, in that the General Purposes Committee had been able to allocate a further £2m to Children, Families and Adults (CFA), nearly half of which would be going to the CYP budget.

The Chairman reported that he, the Vice-Chairman, and the Executive Director: CFA had met the Minister of State for Schools, David Laws, in the previous week. The predominant topic had been the substantial reduction in Cambridgeshire's capital funding. The Minister had not appeared to be fully aware of the revenue consequences of new schools, so the Schools Finance Manager had prepared a briefing paper which the chairman had sent to the Minister. The hope was that a meeting could take place with two of the Minister's officers to follow up the concerns raised.

74. SCHOOLS BUDGETS 2015/16 – UPDATE

The Schools Finance Manager presented a summary update on schools budget setting issues for consideration for 2015/16. Forum noted that the increase in primary numbers between October 2013 and October 2014 had been updated from about 880 to about 1,100 pupils.

In the course of discussion, those present

- noted that the number of early years pupils was increasing slightly, but many more parents were taking up the full 15 hours' allocation, leading to significant pressure on early years places in some parts of the county. Funding for 2-year-olds would be based on actual numbers rather than estimates, with an extra 2-year-old count to take account of the summer increase in numbers which Cambridgeshire experienced
- commented that there had been greater transparency than in the past about changes in the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG), but noted that the primary schools affected were finding it difficult to understand that they were not to receive any increase at a time when they knew that Cambridgeshire schools were receiving an overall increase in funding. It was suggested that Cambridgeshire Primary Headteachers officers should send a briefing note to headteachers to clarify the position when the figures were published; governors asked that the briefing also be sent to governors, for finance committees
- noted that all the secondary schools had supplied information on pupil numbers, but the Department for Education (DfE) had not yet passed the validated data to the Local Authority (LA); it was pointed out that the LA needed a full data set to inform the formula. The information from the DfE was expected on 11th December, with Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) information due in the following week
- noted that the Early Needs and High Needs blocks would not be receiving an inflationary increase; the only increase expected was for demography within the Early Years block, and there was no other intention of moving funding between blocks to meet inflationary

J McCrossan

pressures. Only because of Fairer Funding was the Schools Block receiving an increase

- noted, in relation to the DfE consultation on SEND that the DfE had cited lack of evidence as a reason for not addressing the High Needs block. Officers were due to meet in the next week to examine the data in the consultation data pack, which included both financial and pupil-led data; overall, Cambridgeshire spent a higher proportion of DSG on the High Needs block than the national average. The DfE appeared not to expect there to be any national change to the High Needs block before 2017
- noted that Cambridgeshire levels of autism and behavioural difficulties were above the national average, and that according to DfE schools census data, a slightly higher proportion of Cambridgeshire pupils had special educational needs than the national average, and the level of statements was higher
- suggested that the Children and Young People Committee would be interested to see the figures on SEN broken down by district
- pointed out that the census data put all SEN together; it was necessary to unpack the data to see the effect on each phase and block.

Forum noted the report.

75. GROWTH FUND AND FALLING ROLLS CRITERIA 2015/16

The Schools Finance Manager presented a report setting out proposals for the funding of schools' growth in 2015/16 and the criteria for growth funding to be satisfied by schools that were growing or expanding to meet basic need in their area. Forum noted that local authorities were permitted to toplice the DSG to create a Growth Fund, which could be used to support schools required to provide extra places in order to meet basic need, including pre-opening and reorganisation costs. It was proposed to increase the fund from the 2014/15 level £1.5m to £1.75m for 2015/16 due to the continuing forecast increase in numbers.

Discussing the criteria for accessing growth funding, Forum members

- noted that the proposed thresholds for accessing the funding were unchanged from those applying in 2014/15
- pointed out that paragraph 3.1.2 on Additional Classes and/or Forms of Entry should read 'where the LA has specifically requested, and the school agreed, a school to expand to take an additional class to create capacity...' to reflect the partnership between school and LA.

The report also described the circumstances in which it was permissible to establish a small fund to support good schools with falling rolls where local planning data showed that the surplus places would be needed in the near future. However, because some of the schools in this category locally did not meet the mandatory criterion of having been judged Good or Outstanding at their last Ofsted inspection, officers were not recommending the establishment of such a fund in Cambridgeshire. Commenting on this, those present said that there were small, good

schools with falling rolls not receiving any help when a new school was built nearby, and that it was discriminatory not to support falling rolls in schools that did not satisfy the 'Good or Outstanding' criterion.

The Service Director: Strategy and Commissioning undertook to take forward with the Department for Education (DfE) the point that there was nothing the LA could currently do to support a school affected by the building of a new school nearby, unless it had been judged Good or Outstanding at its last Ofsted inspection.

M Teasdale

The question was posed whether it was better, on a 10-year business basis, to build new schools or to bus people to existing schools; when seeking capital funding, the LA had been dealing with areas that were too large. The Service Director advised that there was a Planning for Growth Project Board, with membership drawn from the Environment, Transport and Economy and CFA directorates; the Board looked at both capital and broader needs. She undertook to raise these issues with the Board.

M Teasdale

It was resolved to approve

1. the increase of the Growth Fund from £1.5m to £1.75m
2. the criteria set out in the report before Forum to be applied from April 2015 subject to Education Funding Agency (EFA) approval.

76. NEW SCHOOLS REVENUE FUNDING 2015/16

The Schools Finance Manager presented a report setting out the proposed approach for revenue funding for new schools. The methodology followed guidance provided by the EFA and required approval by Forum due to the elements funded directly from the Growth Fund.

Forum members noted that (as recorded in minute 73), the Minister of State for Schools had received a briefing paper about the difficulties Cambridgeshire was experiencing in funding new schools. When only one or two new schools a year had been required, the LA had subsidised the new schools from existing schools, but this approach was becoming more difficult as the number of new places needed increased. Over the next eight years, there would be a DSG funding gap of £35m if nothing were to change in how new schools were funded. Asked about the separate funding mechanism for post-16 places, the Schools Finance Manager undertook to provide confirmation of this.

M Wade

One of the primary school headteachers said that a discussion with elected members was being sought to examine growth in relation to voluntary aided schools, in particular to Roman Catholic primary schools. The Service Director: Strategy and Commissioning undertook to alert the Service Director: Learning to this request and the need to arrange a date for a meeting.

M Teasdale

It was resolved

- to approve the proposed approach for new schools for funding pre-opening as set out in Appendix B of the report before Forum and post-opening diseconomies funding as set out in Appendix C.

77. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK CONTINGENCY CRITERIA 2015/16

The Schools Finance Manager presented a report setting out proposals for the allocation of additional funding from the local authority to schools and academies whose number of high needs pupils was not adequately reflected through formula funding, and which could not reasonably be expected to pay the costs of the first £6,000 of additional support for all high needs pupils.

Forum members noted that in 2014/15, the agreed approach to allocate any such additional funding had been based on a direct comparison between the school's Notional Special Educational Needs (SEN) budget and the school level commitments; a similar approach was proposed for 2015/16, subject to some refinements as described in the report. The cost of the additional targeted support would continue to be met from DSG carry forward.

Points made in the course of discussion included that

- it was necessary to think not just about funding per pupil but about provision around that child, for example the space and support required to meet the needs of a child with autism in a primary school. It was noted that part of the SEND commissioning strategy was concerned with this issue
- at a national level, the deprivation component was being looked at because of the pupil premium and concerns that the interplay of the two could result in double funding. Officers advised that the LA had so far always treated the pupil premium as a separate matter, though if the future of the pupil premium on the same basis could be guaranteed, consideration would be given to reducing the deprivation element of the Notional SEN.

It was resolved

- to approve the proposed change to the Notional Special Educational Needs calculation and the High Needs Block Contingency criteria for 2015/16 set out in the report subject to final sign-off by the Education Funding Agency.

78. SPLIT SITE FUNDING

Forum had been advised at previous meetings that within the new funding formula, there was an allowable exceptional factor to provide additional funding to schools operating across more than one site. In accordance with the DfE guidance on acceptable criteria for accessing this funding, criteria for accessing split-site funding within Cambridgeshire were therefore again proposed.

Forum members noted that within the criteria proposed, only one school would be eligible for funding in 2015/16, Hardwick Primary School on the basis that it also operated the Blue School campus in Cambourne.

It was resolved:

- to approve the Split Site funding criteria set out in the report to be applied in 2015/16
- to agree that the criteria and qualifying schools would be reviewed on an annual basis.

79. FORWARD PLAN

Forum noted its agenda plan to July 2015.

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

There were no updates.

81. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Friday 16th January 2015 at 10.00 a.m. Subsequent meeting dates were noted as set out below each commencing at 10 a.m:

- Wednesday 18th March 2015
- Friday 22nd May 2015
- Friday 3rd July 2015

Received the list of proposed dates to June 2016, noting that, instead of meetings in May and July 2016, one meeting was proposed in June 2016. For May and July 2015, it was possible that only one meeting would be needed, on either 22nd May or 3rd July 2015.

Agreed the dates proposed beyond July 2015:

- 10 a.m. Friday 16th October 2015
- 10 a.m. Wednesday 16th December 2015
- 10 a.m. Friday 15th January 2016
- 10 a.m. Friday 18th March 2016
- 10 a.m. Friday 24th June 2016.

Chairman
16th January 2015