

Schools Forum – Minutes

Date: Friday 5 November 2021

Time: 2:00pm – 5:00pm

Venue: Virtual meeting

Present:

Academy Primary - Susannah Connell

Academy Special School – Simon Bainbridge

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

Maintained Nursery – Alex Pearson

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, Jeremy Lloyd, Carin Taylor, Mark Vickers, Alex Pearson and Jon Culpin (Chairman)

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

Observers – Canon Andrew Read and Jon Duveen Joe McCrossan

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: Deborah Parfitt, Patsy Peres, Joe Mc Crossan Councillor Simone Taylor

Quorum on current voting membership: 8

8. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies received from Deborah Parfitt, Patsy Peres, Lesley Birch, Cllr Simone Taylor and Joe McCrossan.

Jonathan Culpin, Chair of the Forum, declared a non-statutory disclosable interest under the Growth Funding section of the Schools Budget Setting 2022- 23 report, in that the Local Authority had agreed to provide growth funding for a school for which he was responsible.

Adrian Ball Chief Executive Officer, Diocese of Ely declared a non-statutory disclosable interest under the Growth Funding section of the Schools Budget Setting 2022- 23 report, in that the Local Authority had agreed to provide growth funding for Pathfinder and Ermine Street Primary Schools.

Richard Spencer Executive Principal (Secondary) Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust (CMAT) declared a non-statutory disclosable interest under the Growth Funding section of the Schools Budget Setting 2022- 23 report, in that CMAT operates Northstowe Secondary College.

9. Schools Forum Minutes – 16 July 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July were approved as a correct record.

10. Minutes Action Log

The forum noted the minute action log.

11. Schools Forum Appointments

The forum received a report setting out the appointments of individuals to fill the vacancies identified at the 16th July 2021 meeting.

It was resolved to note:

- That Lesley Birch, Executive Principal - Cambridge Primary Education Trust, Carin Taylor, Executive Headteacher - Staploe Education Trust and Duncan Ramsey, CEO - Aspire Learning Trust have been confirmed as General Academies Representatives on the Schools Forum.
- That Mark Vickers CEO Olive Academies has been confirmed as an Academies Alternative Provision Representative on the Schools Forum
- That Alex Pearson, Headteacher Homerton Early Years Centre will continue to attend Schools Forum meetings as substitute for Claire

Palmer, Headteacher, Huntingdon Nursery School, the Maintained Nursery Schools Representative.

12. Schools Budget Setting 2022-23

The forum received a report and a presentation in outlining the 2022-23 Schools Budget setting process. The presentation covered;

- The School Funding Arrangements for 2022-2023,
- The Budget Proposals and Consultation Results
- High Needs Block
- Central School Services Block
- De-Delegations within Maintained Primary schools
- Growth Funding / New Schools,
- Required decisions and next steps.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to High Needs Block;

- Sought clarification on the numbers of schools exceeding and expected to exceed their notional Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) budget threshold. It was advised that there were currently around 14 schools exceeding the threshold, however it was known that this number could fluctuate over time.
- Queried whether the £400,000 allocated was sufficient in not just supporting these schools but to cover the needs of further schools throughout the year. Officers confirmed that the amount was calculated with the possible fluctuations in mind, and it was expected to cover the current and future needs.
- Sought clarification on how the notional SEND percentage was calculated. It was confirmed that the percentage was set by Cambridgeshire County Council on recommendation from the Schools Forum, and that this could be reviewed if necessary.
- Queried whether there was a costed action plan for the Invest to Transform budget and whether cost savings were already identified. Officers confirmed that although during the development of the plan some areas of savings were explored, a full plan would be developed jointly with Schools Forum in order to identify further saving opportunities.
- Sought clarification on how and by what bodies the Invest to Transform Fund would be held accountable, and how the effectiveness of the Fund would be measured over a period of time. Officers confirmed that the expectation was that a plan would be jointly developed with the Schools Forum.

The Service Director Education advised that the Schools Forum was expected to agree to establish the Invest to Transform Fund in principal and highlighted that further details would be developed through joint working. This would allow for identification of the best use and application of the Fund resulting in an increased effectiveness.

Individual members raised the following points in relation to Growth Funding / New Schools

- Queried whether reduction of funds would be the best course of action in light of the expected Covid baby boom, which was expected to cause an increase in pupil numbers. Officers advised that the Growth Funding decision was an annual decision, and the reduction would only be applicable for 2021-2022.
- Expressed concern regarding a lack of protective mechanism that would safeguard the jobs of existing trained early years professionals, who could face redundancy, due to the reduction of Growth Funding and the fluctuation in pupil numbers. Officers acknowledged the issue, however advised that the National Funding Formula calculation did not allow any flexibility to cover for these fluctuations.
- Observed that there were no plans to establish any new primary area special schools within the funding provision. Officers advised that confirmation of fund allocation from the Department for Education (DfE) for area special schools was not yet confirmed, however the needs for the provisions were continuously monitoring and highlighted that the current figures were not inclusive of those area special schools that were agreed to be established but that were not yet open.
- Sought clarification on whether the area special schools that were yet to be established would be 'all age' special schools. Officers advised that the current plans only included 'all age' special schools, however it was important to explore whether there were any other forms that would serve the needs of the local area better.
- Questioned the robustness of the local authority's place planning process compared to other local authorities. The Service Director Education explained that the school place planning process was a very complicated matter due to different factors. He explained that the process must allow for some flexibility as unexpected factors such as Brexit, Covid, changes in the delivery dates of housing developments had a huge impact on the planning process and accuracy. The Service Director Education draw attention to the importance of close partnership working which would enable a better, quicker response to local circumstances. He confirmed that the School Organisation Plan would be published in the near future and this would be shared with Schools Forum members. Action required

The meeting was temporarily adjourned to allow for group discussions prior to addressing recommendations. Following the adjournment, the Chair asked members to provide any further feedback before they proceeded to vote.

Subsequently members commented in regard to the Invest to Transform Fund and High Needs Block in that:

- They felt that there was a lack of information regarding the aims of the Invest to Transform Fund and that there was not enough consultation with the Schools Forum before the plans were presented.
- It was not clear whether the establishment of the Fund would be sufficient to address and reduce the current substantial deficit within the budget or what was the primary aim of the Fund.
- Due to the lack of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) there would be no benchmark to measure against the impact of the progress, therefore it was difficult to identify and support the claims of potential savings.
- Detailed information on costings and confirmed arrangements on the governance of the Fund must be agreed before it was established.

The Service Director Education acknowledged that a detailed plan was yet to be established but stressed that the Schools Forum was asked to agree to the establishment of the Funds in principle. He explained that the expectation was that a detailed plan would be developed jointly once the primary principle was agreed. He also highlighted that transparency around the use of the Fund was key, and that the Fund's aim was not to address the current deficit but to transform the way the services were delivered, whilst achieving cost savings and providing quality support for children. The Service Director Education advised that the plans to establish this fund were shared with the Schools Forum on the 24th September 2021 and the monies would not be transferred to the Fund until the 1st of April 2022, which would provide sufficient time to agree on a detailed plan regarding costings, governance and KPIs. Furthermore, he suggested a decision review which would be carried out in January which would give sufficient time to provide further clarity and details.

Funding Formula

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Support the proposed LA approach to align the Cambridgeshire Schools Funding Formula Factors with the National Funding Formula rates for 2022/23. This will be subject to final approval at CYP Committee in January.
- b) Support the proposed LA approach to apply the distance taper to the sparsity factor to maximise the number of schools who qualify for

additional funding in 22/23. This will be subject to final approval at CYP Committee in January.

High Needs Block Transfer

It was resolved by majority to:

- d) Approve a block transfer between the Schools Block and High Needs Block of 0.5% - (circa £2.1m – final amount to be confirmed on receipt of final DSG allocations) – to support the following activities:
 - i. Transformation Programme
 - ii. SEND Contingency Fund
 - iii. ASD/SEMH/ADHD Training
 - iv. SENCO Training
 - v. Support for Additional Provision

Subject to the Local Authority returning to Schools Forum at the next meeting, having undertaken further discussion with relevant representative bodies, with a more detailed, fully costed plan, and, furthermore, the impact of which is reviewed, monitored and evaluated on a regular basis by Schools Forum.

Central School Services Block

It was resolved unanimously to:

- e) Approve the continuation of the Contribution to Children's Services of £1m.
- f) Approve the continuation of the £733k to support early intervention family workers.
- g) Approve the £583k subsidy towards the costs of the Schools Broadband Contract.
- h) Approve the continuation of the £508k to support the Admissions Service.
- i) Approve the continuation of the £3k to support the Servicing of Schools Forum.
- j) Note the proposed budgets for the national copyright licence arrangements, retained duties funding and residual balance. Final figures will be presented at the January meeting of Schools Forum for approval.

Education Functions and De-Delegations – Maintained Primary only

It was resolved unanimously to approve:

- k) The continued retention of £10 per pupil from maintained schools for services specifically provided to maintained schools.
- l) The continuation of the de-delegation in respect of Contingency.
- m) The continuation of the de-delegation in respect of Free School Meals Eligibility.
- n) The continuation of the de-delegation in respect of Maternity and Paternity Cover.
- o) The continuation of the de-delegation in respect of Trade Union Facilities Time.

Growth Funding and New Schools

It was resolved unanimously to:

- p) Approve the revised Growth Funding and New School Funding Policy to apply to 2022/23 only.
- q) Approve the centrally retained growth fund at a level of £1.75m (compared to £2m in previous years).
- r) Note the proposed variation to pupil numbers. Final numbers will be presented to Schools Forum in January.

13. Schools Forum Agenda Plan Update

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that there were no additions to the Forward Plan since publication.

It was resolved to:

Note the agenda plan.

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was agreed to take place on Wednesday 15th December.