

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting held on 10 November 2022

Present: Richard Redgate (Chair)

Attendance

Stephen Drew	Vicki Lewis
William Wilson	Julie Rudge
Richard Sutton	Anne Tapp
Steve Swatton	Alison Parr
Jane Rutherford	Mark Boughey
Philip Siddell	Carolyn Trowbridge
Chris Wright	Jessica Roden
Steve Barr (Vice-Chair)	Emily Verow
Kevin Allbutt	Lindi Nejrup
Judy Wyman	

Observers: Jonathan Price

Also in attendance: Alison Barnes, Will Wilkes, Joanne Galt, Debbie Nash, Tim Moss, Anthony Humphreys and Halit Hulusi

Apologies: Kim Prince Anson, Claire Shaw, Kirsty Rogers, Mark Sutton, Steve Breeze, Sarah Clark and Sadie Jones

PART ONE

1. Declarations of Interest

Steve Barr and Judy Wyman declared an interest in relation to agenda item 10.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2022

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 14 July 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Membership update and up-to-date membership list

Lindi Nejrup is the new 'All Primary (Maintained & Academy)' representative, nominated in lieu of a primary school headteacher forum nomination - to serve until September 2026.

Dawn Freeman is the new 'All Maintained Nursery Schools' representative replacing Nadine Key - to serve until October 2026. Nadine was thanked for her involvement in the Schools Forum.

It was also announced that Jane Rutherford would be stepping down from her role in the Schools Forum as the representative of the 'Secondary Heads Forum'. Jane will be replaced by Alun Harding, who is currently on the Schools Forum as an Observer, to serve until November 2026.

Resolved: That:

- a. Lindi Nejrup had joined the Schools' Forum as the 'All Primary (Maintained & Academy)' representative - to serve until September 2026.
- b. That Dawn Freeman had joined the Schools' Forum as the 'All Maintained Nursery Schools' representative replacing Nadine Key - to serve until October 2026.
- c. That Jane Rutherford had left the Schools' Forum as the representative of the 'Secondary Heads Forum' and was to be replaced by Alun Harding to serve until November 2026.

4. Matters arising

Minute 80 – It was raised that, although consistent financial reporting dictated how the figure was calculated, the maintained schools believed that the reserves figure of 24.3m was somewhat misleading as this figure did not account for earmarked, committed or ring-fenced funds.

Minute 81 – Following a query relating to who was now leading on the Education Banding Tool at an operational level following the retirement of the Lead Officer, it was confirmed that this was now the Head of SEND - Halit Hulusi.

5. Decisions taken by the Chairman under delegated powers

None taken by the Chair since the last meeting.

6. Notices of Concern and Licensed Deficit Agreements

It was reported that, since the last Forum, two new Notices of Concern had been issued; Flash Ley Primary School (deficit position and no recovery plan) and Moor First School (unable to set a balanced budget for 2022/23).

Licensed Deficit plans have also been put into place for Fulfen Primary School and St Leonards Primary School, Stafford.

The Entrust Schools Finance team continue to work with all schools who have existing Notice of Concern or Licensed Deficit agreement.

Resolved: That, the issue and withdrawal of Notice of Concerns to schools be noted.

7. Primary Behaviour Support Services - 2023-24 Financial Year

The Schools Forum received a report of the Director of Children and Families relating to the Primary Behaviour Support Service for the 2021 – 2022 Financial Year.

The purpose of the report was to provide details of the current Primary Behaviour Support Service offered to Staffordshire maintained primary schools, to update on the progress that had been made on the delivery of the recommendations made in the Autumn term (2021) report and to provide further recommendations to support the continued development of the Primary Behaviour Support Service.

The report also sought agreement of continued de-delegated funding from maintained primary schools' delegated budgets. **The approval of this item would take place during the voting process of agenda item 10.**

Following a request to provide figures to show the number of students who had been excluded from Primary Schools, and whether these figures could be broken-down between maintained and academy schools, the Forum was reminded that this was a service provided to maintained schools only and didn't include academy schools. It was explained that this information was available for maintained schools and was agreed that it would be shared with the Schools Forum.

Members queried if quantitative data was available that would allow the Forum to measure the outcomes of the provision. It was explained that the data was available on a district level and could be shared with the Forum, however, when assessing the trends and data, the Forum would need to take into consideration that there may be other services supporting a child so the outcomes may not be attributable to one service.

Resolved: That:

- a. the continued improvements and development of the service during 2021/22, be noted.
- b. the Primary Behaviour Support Services data be shared with Forum members as agreed.
- c. the proposals and recommendations for the financial year 2023/24, be noted.

8. Minority Ethnic Achievement Service (MEAS) 2023-24 Financial Year

The Schools Forum received a report of the Director of Children and Families relating to the Minority Ethnic Achievement Service (MEAS) for the 2021 – 2022 Financial Year.

The purpose of the report was to inform the Schools Forum of the delivery of the current MEAS offer to maintained schools, to update on the progress that had been made on the delivery of the recommendations made in the Autumn term (2021) report, and to provide further recommendations to support the continued development of MEAS. It was noted that the report recommendations only referred to agreeing "to the continued de-delegated funding from maintained primary school's delegated budget for 2023-2024 financial year", whereas the MEAS service was available for both Primary and Secondary Schools. It was agreed that the report should be amended to state this. It was noted that the report recommendations only referred to agreeing "to the continued de-delegated funding from maintained primary school's delegated budget for 2023-2024 financial year", whereas the MEAS service was available for both Primary and Secondary Schools. It was agreed that the report should be amended to state this.

The report also sought agreement of continued de-delegated funding from maintained primary and secondary schools' delegated budgets. **The approval of this item would take place during the voting process of agenda item 10.**

In response to a query relating to the removal of a number of Afghan refugees that had been housed in Newcastle under Lyme and settled in schools in this area, to Manchester and whether they had been able to re-join the original schools, it was

confirmed that this information was not available at the meeting but would be sought and shared with Forum members.

In response to a query relating to the limited funding information in the report, it was confirmed that the detailed cost information was included in the de-delegated item No 10.

Resolved: That:

- a. the continued improvements and development of the service over the last year and proposals for next year be noted.
- b. That additional information requested in the meeting be shared with the Schools Forum.
- c. That the proposals and recommendations for the financial year 2023/24, be noted.

9. Schools Budget 2023-24: De-delegation, Central Expenditure and Education Functions

The Forum received the School Budget 2023-24 de-delegation, central expenditure and education functions report. The report sought approval from the Forum for the Local Authority to retain Dedicated School Grant (DSG) funding to deliver services on behalf of schools and Early Years.

De-delegation

Members noted that the budget areas proposed for de-delegation in 2023-24 were the same as those in the previous years. There was also an assumed level of inflation, these primarily affect pay award inflation. The areas proposed for de-delegation for 2023-24 are:

Budget Area	Primary £m	Secondary (including middle) £m
Insurances (mainly premises related provided by RPA)	1.200	0.932
Staff costs (Maternity Pay)	1.261	1.072
Staff costs (Union Duties)	0.151	0.064
School Specific Contingency	0.390	0.185
Support for ethnic minority pupils or under-achieving groups	0.948	0.345
Licences and Subscriptions	0.601	0.236
Behaviour Support Services	0.572	Delegated
FSM eligibility	0.066	0.035

Forum members representing all mainstream maintained schools considered the budget areas listed in the table above and unanimously voted in favour to de-delegate these areas for 2023-24 with 6 voting in favour, 0 against and 0 abstaining.

Central School Services Block (CSSB)

Members noted that the funding in the CSSB was split into Historic Commitments and Ongoing Functions.

Historic Commitments

It was noted that funding for historic commitments had been reduced by a further 20% compared to 2022-23. The provisional allocation for historic commitments for Staffordshire for 2023-24 was £1.3m.

The only heading under which Staffordshire retains funding for historic commitments was prudential borrowing. The indicative budget for 2023-24 was £924,130. Any remaining historic commitment funding will be transferred to the DSG reserve which is currently in deficit.

Forum approval was also required for the SEN transport budget of £250,140. This was now funded from the High Needs Block.

All Forum members considered the budget areas of historic commitment funding and approved the use of the Historic Commitments funding as set out in the report with 19 voting in favour, 0 voting against and 1 abstaining.

Ongoing Commitments

Members heard that the estimated cost for other ongoing education functions for 2023-24 was £3.9m and were to be funded by DSG through the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB). Any underspend on the CSSB would be transferred to the DSG reserve which is currently in deficit.

All Forum members considered the budget areas of ongoing commitment funding and unanimously approved the use of the Ongoing Commitment funding as set out in the report with 20 voting in favour, 0 against and 0 abstaining.

Growth Funding

Members noted that, as in previous years, the growth funding allocation had been derived using a formula which allocates growth funding based on the differences between the primary and secondary numbers on roll in Middle Super Output Areas (MSOA) in the local authority on the October 2021 and October 2022 school censuses. It was proposed to be used to fund pupil growth in the National Funding Formula (approx. £2m in 2022-23), and allocations as per the Growth Fund and Infant Class Size policies (approx. £740k). Any underspend will be transferred to the DSG deficit balance.

All Forum members considered the Growth Fund allocation and voted in favour of the continuing use of the Growth Funding allocation as set out in the report with 18 voting in favour, 0 voting against and 2 abstaining.

Central Early Years Expenditure

The Local Authority was asking for £1.9m (4.0%) of Early Years funding to be retained centrally. This expenditure funded statutory functions, along with back-office administration and overheads, with Members receiving a breakdown of these costs in the report.

It was agreed that a working group meeting would be arranged, as in previous years, to support the allocation of the 23/24 funding rates for providers. Full details of the allocation would be brought back to the Schools Forum meeting to be held in March 2023.

All Forum members considered the Central Early Years Expenditure and approved the proposed level of central support as set out in the report with 18 voting in favour, 0 voting against and 2 abstaining.

Education Functions for Maintained Schools Only

The LA asked for provisional approval of a levy of £56.47 per pupil from maintained schools to fund Education Functions (as set out in Appendix 3 of the report) previously funded by the Education Services Grant.

In response to a query relating to the increase in levy being primarily against asset management costs, it was confirmed that there was a contract in place with Entrust to deliver this service on behalf of the Local Authority, and that Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) had recently been renegotiated.

All mainstream maintained Schools Forum Members unanimously agreed to approve the levies per pupil (set out in Appendix 3 of the report) to fund the costs of the associated services, with 6 voting in favour, 0 against and 0 abstaining.

Resolved – That:

- a. the outcome of the maintained school vote on de-delegation be approved;
- b. the indicative allocations for both historic commitments and ongoing functions within the Central School Services Block be approved and retained centrally for this purpose;
- c. the continued use of the formula driven Growth Funding allocation be approved;
- d. the retention of £1.9m of Early Years funding centrally be approved and that a working group meeting be arranged to support the allocation of the 23/24 funding rates; and,
- e. the levy per pupil in 2023-24 to fund statutory duties performed by the LA and previously funded by the ESG general duties be approved.

10. High Needs Block

The Schools Forum received a report from the Director of Children and Families relating to the High Needs Block (HNB).

Members heard that the forecast outturn for the 2022/23 High Needs Block was £6.0m overspend. At the end of the last financial year the DSG reserve was in deficit by £8.6m

and will deepen given the expected overspend in 2022/23. Indicative Government funding next year would see Staffordshire's High Needs Budget increase to £122m (c.6%). However, this was insufficient to close the gap and it was likely that a further overspend will arise in 2023/24 of c £8m - there was also a risk that this could be significantly worse given clarifications in the HNB Operational Guide 23/24 regarding the funding of other authority 'Looked After Children'. Left unaddressed the accumulated DSG Deficit was forecast to worsen over the next 4 years to between £70m and £100m by 2026/27.

A 'Deficit Management Plan' (DMP) had been developed, based on the Council's SEND Strategy, that aimed to develop a more inclusive system where more Children and Young People (CYP) with SEND access mainstream education - wherever possible within their local community - and if appropriate with specialist support. This would provide for a more sustainable model, with better outcomes for our CYP and reduce reliance on the non-maintained and independent sector. This would take time to impact and, in order to limit the extent of the accumulated deficit arising over the next few years, the DMP also includes a range of interventions and policy reviews that would provide for additional resource / reduce costs in the short and medium term.

Given the continuing SEND demand, and growing deficit, Schools Forum were asked to approve the transfer of 0.5% funding from the schools block for high needs in 2023/24, which formed a key part of the Council's DMP.

Consultation had been conducted with schools with a response of 25% replying, the results of this consultation were included in appendices 2 and 3 to the report.

Whilst the Forum understood the pressures faced by the Council, it was felt that Members had to vote for the schools they represented and that while funding was needed for the HNB it was felt that this should not be at the expense of the Schools Block of the DSG. It was highlighted that this was a national issue and that Staffordshire's position was not as bad as some other Councils. Members also shared concerns that Schools were struggling to support students coming out of covid, and it was suggested that a lot of work on the SEND offering and model would need to be undertaken. At this stage some members felt that they could not support funding a system that they considered to not be functioning properly at this time.

The Forum considered the information in the report and voted against the proposal to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in 2023/24 with 2 voting in favour, 16 voting against and 2 abstaining.

Members were informed that, as the Schools Forum have not supported the 0.5% Block Transfer Request, the Local Authority would be applying to the Secretary of State to make a final decision on the application to make this switch.

The Deficit Management Plan would be monitored going forward and regularly brought to Schools Forum meetings as part of the routine High Needs Block update report.

The Chair suggested that the Schools Forum Recovery Working Group be reconvened to support the Local Authority with the development of the deficit management plan. This would allow members a more detailed awareness of the data that is being shared

in the recovery template of the deficit management plan. A provisional date had been arranged for the Working Group to take place on 28th November 2022 and Richard Redgate, Alison Parr, Emily Verow and Kevin Allbutt volunteered to participate.

Resolved: That:

- a. the High Needs Block budget 2022/23 and latest forecast outturn be noted;
- b. the latest budget assumptions 2023/24 be noted;
- c. the Deficit Management Plan 2022/23 – 2026/27 be noted;
- d. the outcomes of the Council's consultation with schools regarding the 0.5% funding switch in 2023/24 are noted;
- e. Schools Forum Recovery Working Group be reconvened to support the Local Authority with the development of the deficit management plan.

a) Deficit management plan report

b) 0.5% Block Transfer Request

11. Work Programme and date of next meeting

The future work programme, date of next meeting and future meetings were discussed.

Work Programme

The future work programme was presented to the Forum.

Resolved: That:

- a. the Work Programme be noted.
- b. the Recovery Working Group meeting taking place on the 28th November be added to the Work Programme.
- c. the working group meeting, arranged to support allocation of Early Years funding, be added to the Work Programme.

Date of next meetings

- 12 January 2023
- 23 March 2023
- 13 July 2023 - face to face meeting – Council Chamber, County Buildings, Stafford.
- 19 October 2023

Resolved: That the date of the next meeting be noted.

Chairman