

Minutes of the Schools Forum Meeting held on 9 November 2023

Present: Richard Redgate (Chair)

Attendance	
Stephen Drew	Mark Boughey
Richard Sutton	Carolyn Trowbridge
Steve Swatton	Helen Barron
Kim Prince Anson	Sadie Jones
Kirsty Rogers	Emily Verow
Chris Wright	Alun Harding
Steve Barr (Vice-Chair)	Nicola Mason
Kevin Allbutt	Andrew Skelding
Vicki Lewis	Paul Spreadbury
Anne Tapp	

Apologies given, substitute attended: Philip Siddell, Tim Hopkins attended as substitute

Apologies: William Wilson, Steve Breeze (Rebecca Cann was attending as a substitute for Steve Breeze, but had to give her apologies due to ill health), Abigail Rourke, Jessica Roden and Lindi Nejrup.

Also in attendance: Tim Moss, Sam Tomson, Will Wilkes, Mel Scott, Anthony Humphreys, Joanne Galt, Halit Hulusi, Liam Archer and Simon Humble

14. Declarations of Interest

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

15. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 23

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 13 July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16. Matters arising

Minute 3 – Update to Minute 30 – 23 March 23 - Nursery funding and wraparound childcare update.

Additional information had been received from the Early Years team regarding School-aged wraparound childcare. It was clarified that the School-aged wraparound childcare, which was different to activity-focused after-school clubs, would be a universal offer, open to all children and families. Parents and carers were expected to pay for the wraparound they use, but eligible parents would be able to use government subsidies

such as Tax Free Childcare and the childcare element of Universal Credit against payment for registered childcare.

The Early Years team had been informed that £289 million would be allocated to local authorities over two years (2024-25 and 2025-26) to support flexible, creative and innovative approaches to creating/expanding wraparound through a variety of delivery models. These could include school-based provision operated by the school or a private provider, cluster/hub models which could be provided on or off school site, or child minders.

A handbook was published at the end of October 2023 and the Early Years Team had been through this to better understand the provision. The Team was also in the process of developing a communications plan so that partners, parents and providers would be informed as to how the new provision affected them.

The Forum was informed that the wraparound childcare process would be added to the work programme and an update would be provided at the Schools Forum meeting taking place in March 24.

Minute 3 –Update to Minute 22 of the 13 July 23 meeting, regarding an update to Minute 8 of the 10 November 22 meeting, relating to Minority Ethnic Achievement Service (MEAS).

It was confirmed that there were no Afghan refugees that were going to be evicted from any hotels, and that there "Right to Remain" had been confirmed.

It was also confirmed that refugees that were residing in Staffordshire bridging hotels were now either living in the Community in Staffordshire, if they had chosen to remain in this area, or they were living in the community elsewhere in the Country.

Minute 5 - Membership Update and Meeting Attendance Review

It was noted that, following the process which had taken place in May 2023 to elect new members, Judy Wyman had been included on the Forum as a representative of the Schools' Consultative Group. It was explained to the Forum that Judy had had to step down from this role in the Summer following a change in position within that Group, so would no longer be an acting member of the Schools Forum. Forum members gave their thanks to Judy for her involvement and support over the years. It was also highlighted that Judy had been unwell for some time and was currently in hospital. The Forum sent their best wishes for a full and speedy recovery.

17. Decisions taken by the Chairman under delegated powers

None taken by the Chair since the last meeting.

18. Termly Membership Review and Constitution Update

The Schools Forum received a report from the Director for Children and Families relating to the Termly Membership Review and Schools Forum Constitution Update.

The members were reminded that the membership of the Schools Forum was reviewed within the first two weeks of a new term starting in September, January and April to confirm that the proportions of school representatives remained broadly comparable to the pupil numbers in each of represented categories. The results of that review were included within the Constitution at Appendix C and presented for note by Forum members.

At the same time the opportunity was taken to make minor amendments to the constitution, most notably updating the style and format of the document to ensure it remained in line with current County Council brand guidelines and removing references to the "Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee", which had been changed to "Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee".

It was also proposed that the approval of future amendments to Appendix C of the Schools Forum Constitution be undertaken by the Chair under their designated powers, with the information being presented to members for note at the next scheduled Schools Forum meeting.

Resolved: a. That the September update to Appendix C of the Schools Forum Constitution be noted;
b. That the change of the reference from the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee to the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
c. That the changes of the branding of the Staffordshire Schools Forum Constitution be noted;
d. That it be approved that any future amendments to Appendix C of the Schools Forum Constitution, be undertaken by the Chair under their designated powers, with the information presented to members for note at the next scheduled Schools Forum meeting.

19. Notices of Concern and Licensed Deficit Agreements

It was reported that, since the last Forum, Notices of Concern had been issued to Abbot Beyne School, Hob Hill CE/Meth(C) Primary School, Moor First School, St John's CE(C) Primary School (Swindon), and Wood Lane

Primary School. These notices had been issued because the schools finished the 2022/23 financial year in a deficit position and were unable to agree a Licensed Deficit repayment plan.

Notice of Concern have been issued to Corbett Primary School, Norton Canes High School and Talbot First School. These notices had been issued because the schools were unable to set a balanced budget for 2023/24.

Two new Licensed Deficit agreements had been put into place for Flash Ley Primary School and Fulfen Primary School.

The Entrust Schools Finance team continued to work with all schools that had existing Notice of Concern or Licensed Deficit agreement.

Resolved: That the issue of Notice of Concerns and Licensed Deficit Agreements be noted.

20. Primary Behaviour Support Services - 2024-25 Financial Year

The Schools Forum received a report of the Director of Children and Families relating to the Primary Behaviour Support (PBS) Service for the 2022 – 2023 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 (2022) report and to provide further recommendations to support the continued development of the Primary Behaviour Support Service.

It was noted that schools in the Cannock Chase area often accessed the service. In response to a query regarding the differences between the level of access by districts, it was noted that there was an awareness and willingness to access the services in the Cannock area. The PBS services was looking to undertake a review of the referrals that have been made by the schools in each district to determine the root causes.

In response to a query asking how aligned is the PBS Service worked with the SEND team, it was noted that monthly governance meetings were held with the Assistant Director for Education Strategy and Improvement, and information was regularly reported to the head of SEND, to determine how the service would work together for the benefit of children with SEN and High Needs.

It was highlighted that the PBS service was only available to, and funded by, maintained schools, and as the number of maintained schools dropped, and the number of academies increased, there would be a

smaller number of children accessing the service. In response to a query asking whether this would cause a risk to the future availability of the service, it was suggested that the PBS service would be viewed as part of the wider provision SCC was working toward implementing. This would start with the Enhanced Assess-Plan-Do-Review (EAPDR) pathway, and the Staffordshire Enhanced District Inclusion Support (SEDIS) Model. These services would be available to all schools regardless of whether they are Academy or Maintained. As part of the EADPR model, SCC was committing to half fund the provision that was required. This was pre-statutory support (before an EHCP), which would bolster the space before the Primary Behaviour Support Services was required.

In response to a question asking whether the metrics of the Academy users access the PBS Service were considered so a succession plan could be put in place as the number of maintained schools depletes it was confirmed that the service was accessed on a 50/50 split between Academies and Maintained schools with academies paying for the service.

In response to a question asking whether the PBS Services had the capacity to continue to provide the service, it was noted that there had been an unprecedented level of request received recently, but that the key targets had been achieved and capacity was being managed.

The report also sought agreement of continued de-delegated funding from maintained primary schools' delegated budgets.

Forum members representing maintained mainstream Primary schools considered this request and unanimously voted in favour to de-delegate this funding for 2023-24 with 3 voting in favour, 0 against and 0 abstaining.

Resolved: a. That the continued improvements and development of the service during 2022/23, be noted.
b. That the proposals and recommendations for the financial year 2023/24, be noted.
c. That the outcome of the maintained primary school vote on de-delegation be approved.

21. Minority Ethnic Achievement Service (MEAS) 2024-25 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 (2022) report, and to provide further recommendations to support the continued development of MEAS.

In response to a query relating to the past challenges regarding the recruitment of sufficiently qualified interpreters with the requisite skillset to provide services to the various nationalities that were coming into the area, and whether this was something that was still being experienced, it was confirmed that this was still a challenge, but that schools were being signposted towards services that they could access to provide them with the support they needed. It was also highlighted that many schools were making their own arrangements.

The report also sought agreement of continued de-delegated funding from maintained primary and secondary schools' delegated budgets.

Forum members representing all maintained mainstream schools considered this request and unanimously voted in favour to de-delegate this funding for 2023-24 with 7 voting in favour, 0 against and 0 abstaining.

Resolved: a. That the continued improvements and development of the service over the last year and proposals for next year be noted.
b. That the proposals and recommendations for the financial year 2023/24, be noted.
c. That the outcome of the maintained primary school vote on de-delegation be approved.

22. Schools Budget 2024-25: De-delegation, Central Expenditure and Education Functions

The Forum received the School Budget 2024-25 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 2024-25 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 2024-25 are:

Proposed for de-delegation for 2024-25: Budget Area	Primary	Secondary (including middle)
	£m	£m
Insurances (mainly premises related provided by RPA)	1.454	1.165
Staff costs (Maternity Pay)	1.294	1.190
Staff costs (Union Duties)	0.157	0.071
School Specific Contingency	0.391	0.195
Support for ethnic minority pupils or under-achieving groups	1.014	0.366
Licences and Subscriptions	0.593	0.285
Behaviour Support Services	0.610	Delegated
FSM eligibility	0.064	0.033

In response to a question asking what would happen if the Forum voted against the de-delegation of the budgets, it was confirmed that the budget would be delegated to the Schools, but that the Schools would be responsible for delivery of the services.

Forum members representing all mainstream maintained schools considered the budget areas listed in the table above and voted in favour to de-delegate these areas for 2024-25 with 6 voting in favour, 1 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 again been reduced by 20% compared to 2023-24. The provisional allocation for historic commitments for Staffordshire for 2024-25 was £1.045m.

The only heading under which Staffordshire retained funding for historic commitments was prudential borrowing. The indicative budget for 2024-25 was £924,130. Any remaining historic commitment funding would be transferred to the DSG reserve which was 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.

It was proposed that to avoid confusion in the future, the Schools Budget report be restructured to clearly identify which DSG funding block funds the services being provided. The reconstructed report will distinguish between the approvals that are being requested from maintained school representatives and the decisions that are requested from all Forum

members.

All Forum members considered the budget areas of historic commitment funding and approved the use of the Historic Commitments funding, including SEN transport, 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 2024-25 was £4.1m 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 was currently in deficit.

In response to a question asking what was included in the budget line "Planning for the education service as a whole and Admissions", it was clarified that this budget was used to deliver a range of statutory roles on behalf of all schools.

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 2022 and October 2023 school censuses.

It was proposed to be used to fund pupil growth in the National Funding Formula (approx. £1.3m in 2023-24), and allocations as per the Growth Fund policy (approx. £1m). Any underspend will be transferred to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit balance.

In response to a question asking if the Growth Fund Policy was a Staffordshire owned policy or a National policy, it was confirmed that the Policy was Staffordshire owned, but it follows National guidelines.

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 19 voting in favour, 0 voting against and 1 abstaining.

Central Early Years Expenditure

Following the introduction of the Early Years Funding Formula, central overheads were previously limited to 5% of the Early Years Block Funding for 3 and 4 year olds. With the extension of eligibility entitlements in 2024-25, (15 hours for all 2 year olds from April 2024 and 15 hours for 9 months and over from September 2024) the 5% limit had now been expanded to cover all thresholds to allow local authorities to retain more funding to cover the central costs of the new expanded service. For 2024-25, the Local Authority was asking for £2.2m of Early Years funding to be retained centrally. It was highlighted that the growth of the eligibility entitlements made estimating funding uncertain as demand was unknown. Based on the Government's current forecast of take up, the authority's ask of £2.2m (which equated to 2.4% of eligible funding) was considerably below the allowable funding of 5%. This expenditure funded statutory functions, along with back-office administration and overheads, with Members receiving a breakdown of these costs in the report.

The new 2 Year old rate and 9 months and older rate would be subject to the same Government formula requirements as the 3 and 4 Year old rate. Staffordshire intended to run a 4-week consultation with Early Year providers on high level principles for setting the 2 year old and under rates for 2024/25 and beyond. This consultation would start on Monday 13 November 23 and would close on Friday 8 December 23. A paper would be presented at the January 24 Schools Forum which would include the results of the consultation with Early Years providers.

It was confirmed that a working group meeting would be arranged, as in previous years, to support the allocation of the 24/25 funding rates for providers.

All Forum members considered the Central Early Years Expenditure and approved the proposed level of central support as set out in the report with 20 voting in favour, 0 voting against and 0 abstaining.

Education Functions for Maintained Schools Only

The LA asked for provisional approval of a levy of £57.87 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 7 voting in favour, 0 against and 0 abstaining.

Resolved – a. That the outcome of the maintained school vote on de-delegated budgets be noted;
b. That the indicative allocations for both historic commitments, including SEN transport, and ongoing functions within the Central School Services Block be approved and retained centrally for this purpose;
c. That the continued use of the formula driven Growth Funding allocation be approved;
d. That the retention of £2.2m of Early Years funding centrally be approved; and,
e. That the levy per pupil in 2024-25 to fund statutory duties performed by the LA and previously funded by the ESG general duties be approved.

23. High Needs Block Update and 0.5% Funding Switch Request

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 £20.0m overspend. At the end of the last financial year the DSG reserve was in deficit by £14.2m and will deepen to more than £30m given the expected overspend in 2023/24. Indicative Government funding next year would see Staffordshire's High Needs Budget increase to £131m (c.3% higher than 2023/24). However, this was considerably lower than recent rises and – whilst in line with expectation – would likely see the overspend increase in 2024/25 to c£25m. Left unaddressed the accumulated DSG Deficit was forecast to worsen over the next 4 years to between £150m and £225m by 2026/27.

A 'Deficit Management Plan' (DMP) had been developed, based on the Council's SEND Strategy and Accelerated Progress Plan (APP), 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 included a range of interventions and policy reviews that would provide for additional resource / reduce costs in the short and medium term.

A working group of Schools Forum had met on 23 October to review the

information and actions set out in the DMP. Members of the working groups gave a brief summary of the discussion and information shared.

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 2024/25, which formed a key part of the Council's DMP.

Consultation had been conducted with schools and commenced on Friday 15 September and closed at 5pm on Friday 13 October 2023. This allowed four weeks for schools to respond, the results of this consultation were included in appendices 2 and 3 to the report. The view of schools was largely opposed to the transfer but on a low sample response rate of only 10%.

It was noted that 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. It was highlighted that this was a national issue and that Staffordshire's position was not as bad as some other Councils.

Members reflected that the decision was not an easy decision to make and explored the issue thoroughly before the vote was taken.

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, 12 voting against and 4 abstaining. NB – two members of the Schools Forum had left the meeting before the discussion had finished so did not cast a vote.

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.

SEND Strategy & Accelerated Progress Plan

The Schools Forum received an update on the SEND Strategy & Accelerated Progress Plan. The local authority had developed a strategic plan on how it intended to bring the HNB to sustainable levels over time. This included processes that would involve:

- **Developing Targeted Support**

The local authority had supported the SEND & Inclusion district model which, in turn, had created collaborative working between the Local Authority (LA) and schools. As part of this project the LA, schools and other stakeholders, had established a locality-based model - at a District level - enabling early intervention for the benefit of pupils who were identified as being in need. The Council had put in place additional investment of c£3m to support this model.

A further development of the EAPDR Pathway had been co-produced with schools, education settings, Parent Carer Forum, Health, Social Care and Educational professionals in order to support schools and educational settings with capacity to meet a CYP's SEND needs by accessing the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

- **Collaborative Working**

The LA had worked closely with independent providers to identify cost effective provision for high needs placements that offered value for money and ensured good outcomes for pupils with SEND.

Using the DfE SEND capital funding to create additional provision in Staffordshire special schools based on a detailed analysis of need, specifically in relation to Social Emotional Mental Health needs and Autism.

A pre-statutory SEDIS model accessed via an Enhanced Assess-Plan-Do Review Pathway to provide mainstream educational settings with the resources and support to deliver the graduated response.

- **Partner Contributions**

It was highlighted that the Council would continue to ensure a fair contribution was made from health and social care partners towards the cost of specialist places and provision where appropriate.

It was explained to the Forum that no single action alone would be sufficient to mitigate the existing deficit; this would only be addressed through a combination of interventions. A longer-term financial management plan had been developed that was consistent with the actions and objectives outlined in the Council's Accelerated Progress Plan and wider SEND Strategy.

Members welcomed the update on the actions being taken through the Accelerated Progress Plan and DMP and requested that further updates be included in the Work Programme

Resolved: a. That the High Needs Block budget 2023/24 and latest forecast outturn be noted;
b. That the latest budget assumptions 2024/25 be noted;
c. That the Deficit Management Plan 2023/24 – 2027/28 be noted;
e. That the outcome of the Council’s consultation with schools regarding the 0.5% funding switch in 2024/25 be noted;
f. That the outcome of the Schools Forum vote on the 0.5% funding switch in 2024/25 be noted.

24. Work programme and dates of next meetings

The future work programme, date of next meeting and future meetings were shared with forum members.

Work Programme

It was agreed that an update on the consultation undertaken with Early Years providers relating to high level principles for setting the 2-year-old and under rates for 2024/25 and beyond, would be included on the work programme and presented at the January 24 Schools Forum.

The work relating to the wraparound childcare process would also be added to the work programme, with an update being provided at the Schools Forum meeting taking place in March 24.

It was also requested that the work relating to the Accelerated Progress Plan and Strategy for Special Provision (including information relating to the Special School work and SEDIS model) be added to the Schools Forum Work Programme so an update could be provided at a future meeting.

Dates of next meetings

- Thursday, 18 January 2024, 2:00pm – via Teams.
- Thursday, 21 March 2024, 2:00pm – via Teams.
- Thursday, 11 July 2024, 2:00pm – via Teams.
- Thursday, 17 October 2024, 2:00pm – in person meeting to be held at the County Buildings, Stafford.

Resolved: a. That the dates of the next meetings be noted.
b. That the additional items be added to the 2024 Schools Forum Works Programme.

Chair

