

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLS' FORUM
Minutes of the Meeting Held on 1st December 2021
At 6pm on Microsoft Teams

Present

Members	School /Organisation
George Wolfe	Curbar Primary
Alan Thomas	Northfield Junior
Peter Johnston	The Village Federation
Siobhan Johnston	The Brigg Infants
Jennifer Murphy	Hunloke Park Primary
Thomas Osborn	Baslow St Anne's
Chris Greenhough	Swanwick School & Sports College
Martin Brader	Dronfield Henry Fanshawe
Tom England	Esteem MAT
Julian Scholefield	Esteem MAT
Joy Williams	David Neiper Academy
Tim Croft	Redhill Academy Trust
Laura Needham	Cavendish Learning Trust
Keith Hirst	Brookfield Community School
Sarah Le-Good	16-19 Rep Derby College Group
Jeannie Haigh	Willows Academy
Sarah Baker	Team Education Trust
Peter Crowe	ASCL
Canon Carolyn Lewis	Church of England Diocese - Derby
Deborah Turner	NEU
Michelle Jenkins	Etwall Primary School

Substitutes

Members	School /Organisation
Cilla Holman	Hadfield Infants School

Observers

Members	School /Organisation
Cllr Robert Flatley	Elected Member DCC

DCC Officers/others

Members	School /Organisation
Saranjit Shetra	Assistant Director, Education & Improvement
Iain Peel	Service Director, Schools and Learning
Chris Allcock	CCP Finance
Ankush Sharma	CS Business Development Manager
Phil Burrows	CCP Finance
Amanda Gordon	Childcare Improvement Manager
Elena Beard	CCP Finance
Shelley Kerslake	CCP Finance
Scott Davis	Pay and Reward Manager
Andy Walker	CCP Finance
Ruth Lane	CCP Finance

Martin Brader chaired the meeting. Chris Allcock confirmed that the meeting was quorate and gave the Forum details of recent changes to its membership. David Baker from The Pingle Academy has resigned, Laura Needham from Cavendish Learning Trust, Joy Williams from David Neiper Academy and Sarah Le-Good from Derby College Group have joined.

21/26 Apologies

Members	School /Organisation
Peter Hallsworth	South Normanton Nursery
Nick Goforth	Belper Secondary School
Lisa Key	QEGSMAT
Margaret Mason	Children 1st
Ben Riggott	Parkside Community
Chris Wayment	ASCL
Cllr Alex Dale	Elected Member DCC

21/27 Minutes of the meeting held on 13th October 2021

The minutes were approved for accuracy. Chris Allcock raised a matter arising on page 4 to say that the further report regarding school insurance arrangements has been delayed and an update will now be provided to the January 2022 Forum meeting.

21/28 Schools Forum – Membership Update

Chris Allcock presented a paper to inform the Schools Forum of a change to its membership.

Mainstream schools' membership of the Forum was last reviewed in June 2020 and a refreshed calculation based on October 2021 census pupil numbers indicates that an additional academy place is now required. Rather than reduce the LA maintained sector places by one, it is proposed to increase the mainstream membership by one place to 18 and to reduce the number back to 17 when an appropriate vacancy arises.

Deborah Turner asked if academy representatives should be split between the primary and secondary sectors in line with the maintained sector. Chris Allcock replied that the DfE guidance states that there is no requirement to do this. A simple primary secondary distinction would become increasingly difficult to determine as Trusts are often multiphase. The election of academy representatives is a matter for academy proprietors so it would be difficult for the Authority to enforce a position. However, Chris agreed this issue should be reviewed at the next refresh.

Forum agreed to note the report.

21/29 Salary Sacrifice Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contributions

Scott Davis, Pay and Reward Manager, presented an information item to advise the Schools Forum of the new Salary Sacrifice Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contribution (SSSCAVC) scheme.

The new SSSCAVC is very similar to the current one but has the additional benefit for employees and employers of paying lower National Insurance contributions. A table indicated the savings the employer would make after commission charges had been applied.

Carolyn Lewis asked if this scheme applied to staff employed in Voluntary Aided (VA) schools as staff are employed by the governors rather than the Authority. Scott replied that it is the plan to make this available to staff in VA schools but the school must be using the LA payroll system for the appropriate deductions to be made from salaries.

The Schools Forum agreed to note the report.

21/30 DSG monitoring 2021-22

Shelly Kerslake presented a report to provide the Schools Forum with an update of the Revenue Budget position of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2021-22 up to the end of September 2021 (Quarter 2).

Shelley explained that the DSG monitoring will be updated again in December 2021 and reported to the Forum in January. Shelley explained that the main underspend (£0.723m) was in the Central Services Schools Block (CSSB). This was a planned underspend that reflected the decision of Forum to leave some of this block unallocated at the start of the year to allow the underspend to help reduce the overall DSG deficit.

The main overspend is in the High Needs Block (HNB), predominantly due to rising costs of top ups in the primary, independent and non-maintained sectors. There is an additional risk due to increasing number of children requiring support of between £0.3m and £1.5m to the HNB overspend.

The forecast accumulated deficit at 31 March 2022 is now estimated to be at least £3.945m, this figure could increase to £5.445m if the top up and placements risks materialise. On a positive note, the 0.5% transfer from Schools Block to HNB for 2022-23 agreed at the last meeting will be available to reduce the accumulated deficit next year by around £2.6m.

No comments were raised by members.

The Schools Forum agreed to note the report, the forecast overspend for 2021-22 and the projected increase in the accumulated DSG deficit at 31st March 2022.

21/31 DfE consultation - Reforming how local authorities' school improvement functions are funded

Iain Peel and Chris Allcock presented a paper to inform the Schools Forum of the above national consultation and to consider the issues arising locally.

Iain began by saying the DfE are not looking to reduce local authority funding for school improvement functions but just how they are funded. The consultation suggests a reduction in the school improvement monitoring and brokering grant of 50% in 2022 - 23 and to eliminate it completely in 2023-24. The DfE proposes removing the grant and allowing LAs to fund all of their school improvement activity for maintained schools (outside of their traded services offer) via de-delegating resources from school budgets. The results of the consultation will not be available until late December/January 2022.

The LA has replied to the consultation saying that the time scales suggested are very tight for reducing the grant.

Chris Allcock went on to explain the financial implications. If the government implements its proposals the 50% reduction in grant funding would result in a loss to the LA equivalent to £1,800 per school next year and the LA would need to consider the impact locally both on funding streams and the school improvement service. The timing of the consultation leaves little or no time for major changes to be planned to services in the short term. The options to recover the loss of 50% grant are;

Option 1 - to follow the route expected by the DfE and fund the loss of grant by de-delegating the sum of £1,800 from each LA maintained mainstream school and/or

Option 2 - utilise some of the accumulated de-delegation surplus to offset the impact on schools.

Due to the recent Forum decision to top-slice 0.5% from schools' 2022-23 budgets to help fund our collective high needs pressures, option 1 would represent a further erosion to the increase in school budgets next year. Option 2 would avoid this but would utilise funds that would otherwise be applied against our general DSG deficit.

The LA proposes a compromise solution with £1,800 per school being de-delegated from maintained primary and secondary schools in 2022-23, with 50% of this sum being released to schools from the re-pooled reserve to reduce the cost at institution level. The net cost to each school is £900 which is an average of 0.12% (primary) and 0.01% (secondary) of schools block allocations.

Chris Greenhough asked why a lump sum per school is proposed rather than an amount per pupil as for other the delegated elements. Chris Allcock replied that the current grant is received as a flat rate per school and the proposed de-delegation would reflect this.

Chris also added that he had confirmed that a similar approach would be adopted for special schools and this would be covered in the high needs report to Schools Forum in January 2022.

Carolyn Lewis asked what financial modelling has been done on the impact on different sizes of schools.

Chris confirmed the amount would be £900 for 2022- 23. Derbyshire has 111 schools with less than 100 pupils on roll and £900 would be 0.25% of the budget share on average, for schools with 200+ pupils this would be 0.07%.

Chris reminded the Forum that the 0.5% transfer from Schools Block to High Needs Block had a greater impact on large schools' budgets than smaller ones as the majority of the funding captured was on a per pupil basis. Both of these deductions from school budgets need to be seen in the context of an increase in most national funding formula multipliers of ~3% for 2022-23.

Iain Peel confirmed he has raised the issue of the impact on small schools with the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Deborah Turner said that if this increase caused a particular financial burden on small schools could they apply for a grant from LA to reduce its impact.

Chris replied that the only fund is the contingency fund and it was difficult to see schools qualifying purely on the basis of the school improvement issue as the sums involved were modest. If schools have financial problems, they were likely to be due to other reasons.

A vote then took place on the LA's proposals which were agreed by a majority of 6 to 1 by the primary LA school representatives and 1 to 0 by the secondary sector representative.

The Forum agreed to the Authority's request to de-delegate an additional £1,800 from schools to cover the loss of grant; and supported the release of £900 per primary and secondary school of funds from the accumulated de-delegated surplus in 2022-22. These decisions are subject to the national proposals being implemented from April 2022.

21/32 Central School Services Block budgets 2022-23

Chris Allcock presented the paper to seek Schools Forum approval to the 2022-23 Central School Services Block (CSSB) budgets.

Chris explained that the CSSB budget consists of two elements: ongoing responsibilities and historic commitments. The 2022-23 ongoing responsibilities per-pupil funding rate is 2.5% lower than for 2021-22, the historic responsibilities allocation for 2022-23 is 20% lower than for 2021-22.

The projected CSSB grant for 2022-23, £4.594m, has been based on estimated pupil census numbers from October 2021, which are considered sufficiently robust to be a good indicator of funding for next year.

There was a minor change to the proposed ongoing responsibilities budgets in Table 2 with the cost of pensions for centrally funded staff reducing to £0.130m instead of the £0.172m shown. Forum was asked to pass on the historic commitments allocation, £0.889m, to support the Authority's early help offer and also maximise the historic commitment allocation in future years' settlements.

The total cost of the proposals is £3.964m leaving an uncommitted balance of £0.630m to help towards the accumulated DSG deficit.

No comments were raised from members.

The Schools Forum agreed to the 2022-23 CSSB budgets requested by the Authority as set out in Table 2 of the report, adjusted for the change in pension funding.

21/33 High Needs Block (HNB) 2022-23 – initial review

Chris Allcock presented a paper to report the indicative High Needs Block settlement for 2022-23 and consider the potential implications for spending next year.

The report was a first look at the high needs block and will be reviewed in more detail at the next meeting in January 2022. When the final settlement is received in December the figure will be slightly different due to pupil data changes and changes to imports and exports between LAs.

The current 2021-22 overspend on the HNB reported earlier to this meeting is £3.898m and this will utilise a large part of the additional funding next year.

In the last few weeks work has been undertaken to agree with providers the places to be commissioned for 2022-23. The additional places cost is estimated to be £0.618m with most of the increase being for special schools.

Element 3 top ups are expected to increase due to further demographic changes and if special school places are increasing then, by definition, additional top ups will be required.

No increase in central spend on high needs services has been factored in.

Assuming these estimates are correct next year's high needs block budget is expected to be over-committed by at least £0.931m. If the risk analysis in the earlier monitoring report is correct the overspend in 2021-22 will be even greater by between £0.3m to £1.5m and this will increase the over-commitment in 2022-23.

Key to our DSG recovery plan is keeping high needs costs within the level of the annual grant and the Authority will have to consider as soon as possible the options for how this can be achieved. Failure to balance high needs budget and spend is likely to result in the accumulated DSG deficit increasing still further.

Iain Peel said that work was already being done by Paula Williams with special schools and Out of Area providers. Paula is looking at pupil level plans and deployment of

central support, however, changes need parental agreement. Paula is also working on school exclusions and alternative provision. The HNB currently funds £1.5m of dual registered pupils and this is an area of support that needs to be looked at.

Martin Brader commented that we have been hearing about problems within the HNB for years now and other LAs are in even worse positions. What will happen if we do not address this?

Iain Peel said the DfE are intervening in other LAs and directing cuts rather than them being able to manage their own reductions. The Authority does not want to be in the position of having decisions made for it. Whilst the LA have an absolute duty to deliver SEND support, schools just have the requirement to do their best endeavours. It is worth noting that across the country overspends on SEND budgets for 2020-21 totalled ~£650m.

Julian Schofield said the scale of Derbyshire's deficit is much better than other LAs and whatever reductions we make will take time to show benefits. What time do we get from the DfE?

Iain Peel said most of the LAs he knows are in a deficit position but a small number aren't. Specifically, Nottingham City are doing OK and Nottinghamshire, whilst still in surplus, are very close to a deficit position: however, they both fund SEND in a very different way. Both LAs provide very little funding to schools via EHCPs. He doesn't know what time scales the DfE will operate to in allowing Derbyshire to address its position but agreed with Chris Allcock's analysis that we must first contain our high needs spend before we can look at reducing the accumulated deficit.

Peter Crowe said this is a very difficult situation and every LA has similar challenges. The government must review the nationwide position and SEND legislation. We have a finite budget but issues in schools are not finite. The legal requirement placed on LAs to support each child makes the budget very difficult to control. It is very difficult for LAs to manage the position without central government support and help.

Forum agreed to note the report's recommendations.

21/34 Venue(s) for physical meetings – open discussion

A general discussion led by the Chair, Martin Brader, took place regarding suitable venues for future in-person meetings.

Some people felt the Post Mill Centre in South Normanton was a suitable location and other felt Matlock would be better. Derbyshire is a large county and individual opinions were aligned with their individual locations. Members commented that they would like some in-person meetings and a hybrid option solution was discussed, although it was felt that the technology available did not always make this a suitable option.

The conclusion was to hold the June 2022 meeting at Matlock and then decide on a suitable venue or venues for future in-person meetings.

21/35 Dates of future meetings

27th January 2022 6:00 p.m. (Virtual)

29th June 2022 5:00 p.m. (Matlock)

The meeting closed at 7.05pm.