

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLS' FORUM**

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on 17th July 2024
At County Hall, Matlock at 4.45pm**

Present

Members	School / Organisation
Jennifer Murphy	Hunloke Park Primary School
Peter Johnston	The Village Federation
Chris Greenhough	Swanwick School & Sports College
Nicola Cook	TEAM Education Trust
Michelle Jenkins	Etwall Primary School
Karen Hayes	Esteem MAT
Keith Hirst	Brookfield Community School
George Wolfe	Curbar Primary School
Simon Redfern	St Ralph Sherwin CMAT

Substitutes
None

Observers	School / Organisation
Cllr Ruth George	DCC
Cllr Alex Dale	DCC

DCC Officers/others	School / Organisation
Carol Cammiss	Executive Director, Childrens Services
Dan Careless	Service Director, Childrens Services
Helen Wallace	Director Schools and Learning
Sarah Bryan	Senior School Advisor (Early Years)
Andy Walker	CS & T Finance
Eddie Grant	CS & T Finance
Elena Beard	CS & T Finance
Phil Burrows	CS & T Finance
Ruth Lane	CS & T Finance
Kevin Smith	CS & T Finance
Hazel Coates	Risk & Insurance
Tony Kearsley	Risk & Insurance

Peter Johnston chaired the meeting.

24/10 - Apologies for Absence

DCC Officers/others	School / Organisation
Alan Thomas	Northfield Junior School
Julian Scholefield	Esteem MAT
Emma Hill	QEGS MAT
Cilla Holman	Hadfield Infants
Deborah Turner	NEU

DCC Officers/others	School / Organisation
Canon Carolyn Lewis	Church of England Diocese-Derby
Liz Seymour	Church of England Diocese-Derby
Peter Crowe	ASCL
Cllr Julie Patten	DCC

24/11 - Minutes of The Schools Forum 29th January 2024

The minutes were agreed for accuracy.

The following matters arising were discussed;

- Forum agenda items to be added to the website in advance of meetings – no-one knew whether this has been done.
- Induction pack to be produced and a training session to be arranged – this has not been completed in view of the forthcoming Schools Forum elections and will be addressed when the new Forum commences.
- Name cards to be amended to include titles for DCC representatives – this has been completed

The meeting was quorate by 5.10pm before any decision making items were discussed.

24/12 – Insurance de-delegation

Hazel Coates and Tony Kearsey from DCC Risk & Finance presented a paper where the council proposes to discontinue offering Local Authority Maintained Schools Insurance (LAMS) with effect from 31 March 2025. This is because schools now have a more cost-effective choice of the government’s Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) and other commercial insurance alternatives which are readily available on the open market.

Members discussed the administrative burden and levels of support of the RPA scheme which were both felt to be acceptable. There remains a question mark about the cyber cover element of the package which Academy representatives who already have the RPA said was very difficult to qualify for. Hazel Coates confirmed that the LA do not provide cyber cover either as DCC are unable to meet the insurance requirements to purchase outside cover. Motor and engineering insurance is a separate traded service which would continue to be the case as RPA does not cover these areas either.

Eddie Grant confirmed that currently insurance for schools is de-delegated from the budget share of schools and this can be continued with RPA which is a very similar price to the current DCC arrangements.

Members voted that their preference would be for the LA to arrange RPA for all LA schools and de-delegate from the budget share by a margin of 4 – 1, with one abstention and 3 members who didn’t vote.

Proposed next steps are;

September 2024 – Communication to all schools currently buying insurance from the council summarising the action that must be taken for insurance cover from 1 April 2025.

October 2024 - Presentation to the Schools Forum on the RPA and the commercial insurance market for the education sector.

31 January 2025 – Latest date for schools to advise the council if they intend to obtain commercial insurance from 1 April 2025. Schools do not need to advise the council if they are joining the RPA.

24/13 – School forum elections/constitution

Eddie Grant presented a paper regarding the Schools Forum constitution and forthcoming elections.

The current constitution of the Schools Forum was provided in full in the agenda. Elections are required every four years with the next one now due for the September 2024 to August 2028 period.

A long discussion took place around the appropriate membership split between LA maintained school representatives (Primary and Secondary) and Academy representatives due to the gradual academisation of schools in Derbyshire. In summary, LA schools' representatives and Academy representatives are elected to the Forum and non school members are nominated. All have voting rights. Observers are as the name suggests and DCC representatives are to provide advice, information and support. The number of elected representatives is based on the pupil numbers in their sector.

Elena Beard confirmed that based on the October 2023 census, there should be six maintained Primary and 1 maintained Secondary and 11 Academy representatives. These numbers will change as the number of Academy schools in Derbyshire increase.

It was agreed that the LA take responsibility for the elections, including the membership breakdown and Peter Johnston asked members to consider putting themselves forward again so that the expertise in the room would not be lost.

Councillor Alex Dale and Carol Cammiss agreed to remove the temporary LA maintained school member from the constitution which appeared to be within their powers and investigate whether the Schools Forum should be supported by Democratic Services rather than CST Finance staff as is currently the case.

Action point	Responsibility	Timeline
Arrange elections for the new Forum	EG	September 2024
Approach Democratic services to see if they	Cllr Dale and CC	September 2024

Action point	Responsibility	Timeline
should be supporting the Schools Forum		

24/14 – Update from Strategic Lead for Schools and Learning

Helen Wallace presented a slide show about the redesign on the Inclusion Support Service which is attached.

This has been shared with schools 4-6 weeks ago.

Helen said that most LA's don't have inclusion services support and we are lucky in this respect. The redesign looks to increase capacity in schools, special schools and ERS units and support every school with an Inclusion Support Teacher.

Peter Johnston thanked Helen for the update and then a lengthy discussion then took place, during which;

Kevin Smith confirmed that the High Needs Block is a finite amount of money and expenditure on inclusion support will come out of the HNB. Schools Forum can make certain spending decisions regarding the HNB and nothing will change for 2024- 25. In future years decisions will have to be renewed

Cllr Alex Dale said if the new programme is effective this should be a more efficient spend of HNB as fewer EHCP's will be required, therefore, the HNB deficit should reduce.

Chris Greenhough established that the new offer is for mainstream schools only, however, he made the point that special schools struggle with exclusion and part timetable timetables too.

Helen Wallace confirmed she would look at how special schools could be supported but she is not sure that the inclusion staff would have more knowledge than special school staff. She also confirmed that schools would be told who their Support Teacher would be in the next few days.

Dan Careless agreed that inclusion support should be put on the Schools Forum agenda for review in the future.

Action point	Responsibility	Timeline
Inclusion Support to be included on the agenda at a future Schools Forum meeting	EG	December 2024

24/15 – I-Vengers Funding discussion

No paper on this item was provided to the forum in advance

Dan Careless said that Children's Services currently part-fund I-Vengers with £33,000 per annum and that the LA would be requesting that this be funded via the DSG from 2025-26.

Peter Johnston wanted colleagues to be aware, however, the decision was not a matter for tonight, but he did feel the programme is very valuable and beneficial to schools.

24/16 – DSG Outturn

Eddie Grant presented a paper to provide the Schools Forum with the final position of the Revenue Budget outturn position of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2023-24.

The opening balance at 1st April 2023 was a deficit of £4.775m. The 2023-24 DSG over spend was £12.170m, resulting in a closing deficit balance at 31st March 2024 of £16.945m.

The most significant in-year overspend was the High Needs Block of £13.156m, which was broken down in Appendix 1. The majority of the over spend was due to top up funding exceeding the budgets by £14.158m with the largest individual area being an over spend of £6.557m for Special Top-ups – Independent/NM schools.

Cllr Ruth George asked whether the under spend on Early Years Block (EYB) of £1.035m could be used to support this sector further as only 96.5% of the EYB was allocated directly to EY settings. Eddie Grant and Sarah Bryan replied that it was difficult to explain but the budget was based on estimated take up which is difficult to judge in advance and that the under spend was due to lower take up levels although data did show that there is a sufficiency of supply.

Cllr Alex Dale asked if there was any way of utilising this underspend and Eddie Grant replied yes, we could, but the overall DSG deficit is £17m including this. Kevin Smith said the whole position was complicated but the DFE are adamant that the DSG is one pot of money which is overspent overall. Cllr Alex Dale asked if we could continue to monitor this and if the EYB repeats the underspend in future years could it be looked at and used for SEND support.

Individual School Balances - Collectively, local authority schools overspent in-year by a total of £0.924m after allowing for a reduction of £1.280m due to schools converting to academy status. Overall, school balances totalled £30.555m at 31st March 2024 and £0.541m was held in the Schools' Capital Reserve account. This reserve holds earmarked funds for future capital developments at individual schools in order to minimise the distorting effect of holding these funds within their own school balances.

No questions were raised on schools' balances.

Schools Forum noted

- the report and the overspend for 2023-24 DSG
- the increase in the accumulated DSG deficit
- the position in regards of school balances

24/17 – School Rates Funding

Eddie Grant presented a paper to update the Schools Forum on the funding of schools National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) rates.

The current position in Derbyshire is that academies pay the district councils and submit a claim to the DfE to receive funding for their NNDR and for maintained schools Derbyshire County Council organise DSG funding and payments to district and borough councils for the NNDR on behalf of schools.

Each year the DfE allocate funding to LA's for NNDR within premises costs as part of the Schools Block DSG. It is funded on a lagged basis using the previous year's NNDR estimates. As NNDR costs increase on an annual basis then each year there is a resulting gap in the funding that is met from the overall Schools Block DSG. This gap can be greater in years where the Government make significant changes to the elements in the NNDR formula.

In regard to academies the DfE recoup the initial academy allocation for NNDR from the Derbyshire County Council DSG allocation. Any gap between the initial allocation and actual payment of submitted claims by academies is funded by the DfE, so should not impact individual academy finances.

For maintained schools NNDR Derbyshire has to currently continue with the historic system where the wider Schools Block DSG allocated to Derbyshire is used to fund the NNDR gap. For 2023-24 the gap was £519,401 between funding and the DfE allocation for maintained schools. For 2024-25 the gap was £359,505 between funding and the DfE allocation for maintained schools. As the wider Schools Block allocation is used to fund this gap it means that the funding rates in Derbyshire's funding formula for schools and academies have to be lower than they could be.

Whilst the impact for future years is unknown it would be beneficial to schools and academies for billing authorities to unanimously agree to the DfE's streamlined payment system as this would mean all schools and academies would pay NNDR on the same scheme and basis and avoiding the gap that needs to be funded by the wider DSG allocation.

In April 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced a streamlined payment process for NNDR to reduce burdens on local authority maintained schools and academies, but it requires the eight District Councils to implement the process. To date, two billing authorities agreeing to implement, one refusing and five not responded to DfE communications on this.

Cllr Alex Dale said he had already requested that NEDC review their decision and he would support writing to the other district councils.

Peter Johnston suggested the LA write over the summer to the district councils and if they do not agree he suggests schools lobby their own district council via a template letter that could be provided by the LA.

This course of action was approved by Schools Forum.

Action point	Responsibility	Timeline
Write to District Councils over the summer to request the DFE streamlined process be implemented	EG	September 2024

24/18 – Change to Pupil Growth Fund 2024-25

Eddie Grant presented a paper to seek the Schools Forum approval for amended plans in the use of the Key Stage 1 Class Size element of the Pupil Growth Fund (PGF), due to policy changes, and the Falling Rolls Fund (FRF) for 2024-25.

Pupil Growth Fund

The plans for distribution of the Pupil Growth allocations are listed in table 2.

The allocation of the KS1 class size was agreed at the January 2024 Schools Forum meeting, however, the DfE have issued a policy amendment meaning that part of the agreed criteria preventing a school receiving it based on size are no longer permitted, specifically the condition that Derbyshire had whereby a school had to have less than 180 on roll to qualify.

Rather than distribute the £0.300m allocated over a larger cohort which would reduce the amount per school, it is proposed that the existing contingency of £0.050m is used for the summer term (5/12ths) meaning that £0.070m is required from the residual contingency for the autumn and spring terms (7/12ths). This keeps the multiplier broadly in line with previous years.

No questions were raised and this was agreed by the Schools Forum.

Falling Rolls Fund

Local Authorities will continue to have discretion over whether to operate a

falling rolls fund. Schools Forum approved the operation of a fund £0.140m at its January 2024 meeting on the basis of

- School Capacity Survey (SCAP) shows that school places will be required in the subsequent three to five years (this is a mandatory requirement)
- the school saw a reduction of at least 20% of its pupil numbers between October 22 and October 23
- the school will need to make redundancies to contain spending within its formula budget and it is expected (using SCAP data – detailed above) that these posts will need to be re-filled in the subsequent 3 to 5 years.
- the total loss of the number of pupils within those schools with at least a 20% reduction on roll would form the multiplier for 2024-25. The resultant multiplier, per pupil reduced is therefore £737.

After contacting schools with a 20% reduction of pupils, Phil Burrows confirmed that nine of the 13 schools originally identified were making/have made some kind of staff reduction/re-organisation as a result of the reduction in pupil numbers. If the Forum continue to wish to allocate this funding, the question is should nine schools receive 9/13ths of the Falling Rolls fund or should 13 schools share the full £0.140m.

No questions were raised and the Forum agreed that 13 schools share the full £0.140m.

Action point	Responsibility	Timeline
Pay the Falling Rolls Fund to Schools	PB	September 2024

24/19 – What have we achieved for the Children

Karen Hayes suggested that the inclusion support changes should impact and support more children.

Peter Johnston said that knowledge of inclusion support changes will spread, falling rolls funding will support those 13 schools and insurance delegation will save money which will all enable more money to be spent on the children.

The meeting closed at 6.55pm.

Summary of action points

Action point	Responsibility	Timeline
Arrange elections for the new Forum	EG	September 2024
Approach Democratic services to see if they should be supporting the Schools Forum meeting	Cllr Dale and CC	September 2024
Inclusion Support to be included on the agenda at a future Schools Forum	EG	December 2024
Write to District Councils over the summer to request the DFE streamlined process be implemented	EG	September 2024
Pay the Falling Rolls Fund to Schools	PB	September 2024