

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 23 October 2024 at County Hall, Matlock at 5pm

Present

- Emma Haywood - Alfreton Nursery School
- John Payne - Edale Primary School
- Matt Stretton - Coton in the Elms Primary School
- Nadeem Shah - Park Schools Federation
- Peter Johnston - The Village Federation
- Heather Watts - New Mills Secondary School
- Gary Mizler - Learners Trust
- Donna Hain - Redhill Academy Trust
- Nicola Cook - Team Education
- Adele France - Minerva Learning Trust
- Paul Scaife - Embark Trust
- Keith Hirst - Redhill Academy Trust
- Deborah Turner - NEU
- Peter Monk - ASCL

Substitutes

- Liz Seymour - Church of England Diocese - Derby

Observers

- Councillor Ruth George, DCC
- Councillor Alex Dale, DCC
- Councillor Robert Flatley, DCC

Derbyshire County Council officers

- Dan Careless - Service Director, Childrens Services
- Helen Wallace - Director, Schools and Learning
- Sarah Bryan - Senior Advisor, Children's Services
- Jenny Webster - DCC, Head of Development
- Kevin Smith - CS & T Finance
- Eddie Grant - CS & T Finance
- Phil Burrows - CS & T Finance
- Elena Beard - CS & T Finance
- Andy Walker - CS & T Finance
- Ruth Lane - CS & T Finance

- Hazel Coates - CS & T Risk and Insurance
- Tony Kearsley - CS & T Risk and Insurance

Apologies for absence

- Cassie Hurt - Eureka Primary School
- Chris Greenhough - Swanwick School and Sports College
- Grant Worthington - Flying High Trust
- Karen Hayes - Esteem MAT
- Canon Carolyn Lewis - Church of England Diocese - Derby
- Simon Redfer - Catholic Diocese Academy Trust
- Andy Kelly - Substitute Academy

24/21 Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Nominations were invited in the room for the position of chair, Peter Johnston was the only nomination and was duly elected. Nominations for the position of vice chair or invited for the next meeting.

Action point: Nominations for Vice Chair to be invited for the next meeting

Responsibility: EG

Timeline: December 2024

24/22- Minutes of The Schools Forum 17 July 2024 and actions arising

The minutes were agreed for accuracy.

The following matters arising were discussed:

- The election for the new Schools Forum had been completed.
- Councillor Dale has spoken to Helen Barrington in Democratic Services with a view to that department taking on the administration support for the Forum. The department are considering what support they could offer and an update will be requested for the next meeting.
- Helen Wallace agreed to give a verbal report regarding inclusion support under agenda item 7.
- Kevin Smith confirmed he had written to section 151 officers of the district councils regarding rates and they have requested further information from Derbyshire County Council. This item will be followed up on a future agenda and an update had been provided to the DfE.
- Phil Burrows confirmed that the falling rolls fund has been paid to schools.

Confirm with Democratic services what support can be provided to Schools Forum meetings

Responsibility: Councillor Dale

Timeline: December 2024

Action point:

Provide update from District Councils regarding the DfE streamlined rates processes

Responsibility: KS

Timeline: December 2024

Peter Johnston made the following points to Forum members:

- Membership of the Schools Forum should be treated as a professional role even though it is a voluntary position.
- The previous Forum membership had agreed that in person meetings were preferable and hybrid meetings (mixture of online and in person) did not work well. In cases of extreme weather, a Forum meeting can be swapped onto Teams at late notice and if an individual member would like to attend online following unforeseen circumstances this could be accommodated as a one off. Continuation of these arrangements were agreed by consensus by the new Forum members.
- Thanks were expressed to LA officers for the induction and drop-in sessions for new members.
- The jargon buster and slides used at the induction would be circulated to all members as he is very keen that people understand what is happening at forum meetings.
- The core purpose of the Forum is to make financial decisions on behalf of pupils in Derbyshire and whilst it is OK to talk about other things at times, we need to stick to our remit.
- Other LA representatives use Schools Forum to share information with members, not to be held to account.
- A website is available. [Derbyshire Schools Forum - Derbyshire County Council](#)
- Documents need to be sent out by PDF and not word in future.

Forum members were then asked to introduce themselves.

Nadeem Shah asked if there was anything in the Forum constitution regarding the number of members from an individual MAT. Kevin Smith replied that the DfE guidance indicates the maximum number of members per trust is two.

Nadeem then asked if the Forum had fair representation for small schools as they do not have high pupil numbers and Kevin Smith replied that the DfE guidance states that overall sector membership is based on pupil numbers and not size of individual schools.

Kevin added that the constitution of the forum does need formal review at a future meeting.

Action point: Jargon Buster and induction slides to be circulated to members
Responsibility: EG
Timeline: November 2024

Action point: Schools Forum documentation to be provided in PDF format
Responsibility: EG
Timeline: On-going

2024 to 2023 – De-delegation consultation

Eddie Grant presented a paper to ask representatives of LA maintained primary, secondary and special schools on the Schools Forum to consider the de-delegation (re-pooling) of funds for 2025 to 2026.

Although the DfE have not yet published their operational guidance relating to school budgets for 2025 to 2026, due to the General Election delaying them, it is expected that the guidance will continue to allow local authorities, with the approval of their Schools Forum, to de-delegate funding for specified services next year.

On 11th September 2024, the LA wrote to all maintained schools in Derbyshire. The letter invited LA maintained primary, secondary and special schools to give their views on the services they wished to see funding de-delegated for next year. Schools were asked to submit their responses on or before 14 October 2024. Table 1 shows schools responses which range between 87.1 to 92.2% positive support for de-delegated items in the primary sector, 80% to 100% in the secondary sector and 100% only in the Special sector.

The LA intends to discontinue offering insurance directly to all schools with effect from 1 April 2025 and recommends the RPA to schools. The RPA offers an arrangement specifically designed for schools with comparable cover to that currently offered by the council, but also includes cyber cover and a level of technical support which the council is unable to provide. The current rate per pupil charged by the RPA is £25.

Schools were consulted with two options:

- Option 1 – The LA arranges for all schools to join the RPA. A deduction is made from the LA's DSG by the Department for Education for the appropriate value, and reflected in schools' budget arrangements where

these apply. Note that the scheme is a cost per pupil/place including early years.

- Option 2 – There is no deduction from schools' budgets and schools directly join the RPA or arrange their own insurance through a broker.

Whilst schools were in favour of the LA enrolling all schools onto the RPA arrangements it was subsequently confirmed by the DfE that this was no longer an option and schools would need to enrol individually.

The actual de-delegation rates for next year will be determined by the Authority as part of the 2025 to 2026 budget process. The rates for 2024 to 2025 are provided in Appendix 1 and whilst no material changes are anticipated these rates will be reviewed and subject to adjustments to reflect the impact of pay awards and inflation on de-delegated functions.

Helen Lumb from the DfE Schools Commercial Team gave a detailed presentation on RPA insurance.

A discussion then took place:

- Heather Watts asked for a comparison of the list of de-delegated items compared with other LA's. Eddie Grant replied that these items were not benchmarked and Kevin Smith added that the list is unique from LA to LA. The votes submitted show that maintained schools value the services offered and for example, although a number of LA's may offer maternity cover, the details of the scheme may well differ making a financial comparison difficult.
- Adele France said there had been a high response rate for a consultation of 50% in primary schools, 71.4% of secondary schools and 50% of special schools.
- Turning to the RPA arrangements Peter Johnston asked if there was any mechanism for LA's to sign up on schools behalf and Helen Lumb responded that each school needs to sign up individually and once signed up annual renewal was automatic. The DfE would ensure each LA are advised which schools have signed up and sign-up can be done in advance. A school could sign up straight away for insurance to start in April 2025.
- Hazel Coates confirmed that Risk & Insurance within the LA would collate the list of schools who had signed up and will support schools with the transition process, including writing out to schools in the next 2 to 3 weeks.
- Nadeem Shah commented that Derbyshire are managing this change very well compared with Nottinghamshire County Council who gave schools 3 weeks notice they would no longer be providing insurance for their maintained schools.

Schools Forum representatives of LA maintained primary schools voted in favour of de-delegating / top-slicing the budgets in Table 1 for 2025 to 2026 for their sector by four votes to zero.

Schools Forum representatives of LA maintained secondary schools voted in favour of de-delegating / top-slicing the budgets in Table 1 for 2025 to 2026 for their sector by one vote to zero.

The representative for maintained special schools was not present, but Phil Burrows agreed to write to Chris Greenhough to provide a vote to agree to top-slice the budgets in Table 1 for 2025 to 2026 for their sector.

Schools Forum seeks the Council's approval to the arrangements arising from above.

Action point: Write to Chris Greenhough to vote on top-slicing for special school sector

Responsibility: PB

Timeline: November 2024

2024 to 2024 – School funding consultation / Scheme of delegation update

Eddie Grant presented a paper to:

1. inform Schools Forum of the Authority's funding consultation for 2025 to 2026.
2. summarise the responses received to the consultation.
3. invite Schools Forum views on the Authority's proposals to pare back all NFF multipliers should the full NFF multipliers be unaffordable within the Schools Block allocation for 2025 to 2026, as set out in the consultation.

The DfE have yet to publish the National Funding Formula (NFF) for 2025 to 2026 that is ordinarily available in July. Latest advice is that it is anticipated after the budget announcements on 30 October. Major changes to the schools NFF in 2025 to 2026 are not anticipated, but know changes were advised.

In the absence of the DfE's indicative settlement, the indicative core Schools Block for 2025 to 2026 is unknown. If it transpires that this sum is insufficient to fund schools' formula budgets at full NFF multipliers next year, then the LA prefers to apply a pareback of all multipliers to meet any shortfall. The reason for any potential shortfall will almost entirely be due to increases in the number of children eligible for free school meals (FSM). The FSM data used to drive the Schools Block allocation will be based on numbers as of October 2023 however, the deprivation data which determines schools' individual budgets will be based on the more recent, and thus higher, counts. The extent of any shortfall will not be confirmed until the final settlement details are published in December 2024. We have been unable to

estimate local calculations this year as multipliers have not been published. You may recall that the 2024 to 2025 budget multipliers were pared back by 0.19% due largely to the FSM increase.

A consultation has taken place to seek the views of schools and academies on how the expected shortfall should be addressed.

Schools and academies' views are also being sought on the MFG, which for 2025 to 2026 is unknown, but we are hopeful that previous years' levels can be set i.e. between zero and +0.5% per pupil.

Given our current DSG deficit position, the Authority cannot sanction any outcome that would further increase the DSG deficit. It therefore has no option but to address the shortfall in-year from within the Schools Block.

Given the inflationary pressures facing all institutions, our preferred way forward is to pare back all the multipliers to achieve a balanced position. It should be noted that no reduction would be applied to the MPPL thresholds as these are protected under national regulations. This approach would scale budgets by deducting a small percentage from all multipliers.

The MFG is designed to provide a minimum year on year increase in per pupil funding. The LA is anticipating it will be able to set an MFG for 2025 to 2026 of between zero and 0.5%. This is a narrow range and our financial modelling suggests the impact of choosing the upper or lower limit will have only a limited impact in overall terms (less than £10,000). Accordingly, the Authority is minded to set the MFG rate at 0.5% per pupil, the maximum allowed next year.

Officers' Recommendations

1. The Schools Forum is asked to note the Authority's consultation and the views expressed by respondents.
2. The Schools Forum is asked to note and give its views on the principles the Local Authority will use to balance the budget in the event full NFF multipliers are unaffordable within the final Schools Block allocation.
3. The Schools Forum is asked to note and give its views on the Authority's proposal to adopt an MFG rate of 0.5% if allowable for 2025 to 2026.

Councillor Dale asked that as there is speculation that employers will have increased NI contributions following the forthcoming budget, would there be a grant to cover any additional costs. Eddie Grant replied that the current grants received by schools for similar purposes were all in respect of previously announced increased in costs and there was no indication either way as to whether a grant would be forthcoming.

Deborah Turner commented that the previously announced grants in general had not covered all the staffing cost increases.

Kevin Smith said that employer pension contributions were reviewed tri-annually and that grants did in fact cover the increase, however, future reviews may change contributions.

No further comments were raised.

2024 to 2025 – Risk Protection Arrangement (RPS) presentation

This item is covered under item 24/23 – De-delegation consultation.

2024 to 2026 – Update from Strategic Lead for Schools and Learning

In view of time restraints this item is deferred to item 1 on the next agenda, however Helen Wallace did offer to answer any immediate questions of which there were none.

Action point: Include Update from Strategic Lead for schools and Learning as item 1 on the agenda

Responsibility: EG

Timeline: December 2024

2024 to 2027 – DSG Quarter 1 monitoring

Eddie Grant presented a paper to provide the Schools Forum with the quarter 1 projected Revenue Budget outturn position of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2024 to 2025.

The estimates in this report are based on the best available information as of July 2024. The quarter 2 monitoring exercise is in progress and there continues to be significant pressures on the High Needs Block and the position will get worse.

The net total DSG deficit brought forward from 2024 to 2025 was £16.945 million and is forecast to grow by a further 17.428 million in 2025 to 2026, resulting in a total forecast deficit of £34.374 million.

Full details of the areas of overspend were provided with High Needs Block being the major contributor, forecast to overspend by £18.736 million.

The key question is how we stop the increasing spend in the High Needs Block. Currently the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is not included within LA overall balances, however, this ceases to be the case from March 2026.

A discussion then took place:

- Peter Johnston agreed that High Needs funding is the big issue facing schools and the Forum would return to this at future meetings. Eddie Grant added that the LA is working on a high needs block management plan.

- Councillor Dale wished to reassure members that this is not only a local challenge. There is a £5 billion deficit across the country in High Needs expenditure. He is chair of a National F40 group (the 40 lowest funded LA's in the country) and they are lobbying government in this respect. He recently attended a parliamentary briefing at which 80 MP's were also in attendance, demonstrating much increased engagement. The National Audit report will be released tomorrow [Support for children and young people with special educational needs - NAO report](#) which makes interesting reading and the ISOS partnership report is also well worth reading.
- If current regulations say that DSG deficits must be repaid from future years allocations how will this be achieved? Eddie Grant reiterated that within existing regulations we firstly need to look at containing expenditure and one option for this could be transferring 0.5% of Schools Block to High Needs Block which would apply to all schools, academies and maintained schools alike.
- Deborah Turner added such a transfer has been done once before but did not solve any problems.
- Dan Careless said sufficiency of provision is a big problem and the next Education Partnership meeting would be discussing LA provision and independent sector provision and we all need to be fully sighted on the financial pressure in schools.
- Councillor George commented that the expenditure on the independent sector is the figure that really jumps out.
- Dan Careless said that the capital funding allocated for High Needs provision is being discussed with schools on an ongoing basis especially at a cluster level.

The Schools Forum noted:

1. The report and the forecast overspend for 2024 to 2025 DSG.
2. The increase in the accumulated DSG deficit.

At this stage Peter Johnston confirmed that meetings are generally completed within the two hours allocated even though this was not the case this evening, however, members must feel free to ask questions.

2024 to 2028 – What we have achieved for the children

Two points were noted:

- Approving the de-delegation items creates capacity for school leadership to focus on the children.
- Moving forward the RPA arrangements will provide insurance for the future for the children.

The meeting closed at 7.20pm.

Next meeting is Wednesday 11 December 2024 at 4.45pm at County Hall, Matlock.

Summary of action points

Action point: Nominations for Vice Chair to be invited for the next meeting

Responsibility: EG

Timeline: December 2024

Action point: Confirm with Democratic services what support can be provided to Schools Forum meetings

Responsibility: Councillor Dale

Timeline: December 2024

Action point: Provide update from District Councils regarding the DFE streamlined rates processes

Responsibility: KS

Timeline: December 2024

Action point: Write to District Councils over the summer to request the DFE streamlined process be implemented

Responsibility: EG

Timeline: December 2024

Action point: Jargon Buster and induction slides to be circulated to members

Responsibility: EG

Timeline: September 2024

Action point: Schools Forum documentation to be provided in PDF format

Responsibility: EG

Timeline: Ongoing

Action point: Write to Chris Greenhough to vote on top-slicing for special school sector

Responsibility: PB

Timeline: November 2024

Action point: Include Update from Strategic Lead for schools and Learning as item 1 on the agenda

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