

Minutes - Sheffield Schools Forum

3.00-5.00pm, 13 December 2021, via Microsoft Teams
Chair: Paul Stockley

Schools Forum Members:

Primary Heads Representatives

Nigel Brooke-Smith (Greystones)
Cathy Rowland (Dobcroft Infant)
Paul Stockley (Bradway)

Primary Governors

Alison Warner (Grenoside)

Secondary Head

Linda Gooden (King Edward VII)

Non-school Members

Mo Andrews, Pye Bank CE Primary
Stephen Betts, Learn Sheffield
Karen Simpkin, Early Years providers
Toby Mallinson/Rod Padley, Trade Unions
Vacant Seat, 14-19 Sector

Academies

Keith Crawshaw (Sheffield South East Trust)
David Dennis (Tapton)
Jim Dugmore (Oughtibridge)
Chris French (Mercia Learning Trust)
Stacy McKay (Springs Academy)
Morag Somerville (Steel City Schools Partnership)

Special Academies

Joel Hardwick (Nexus Multi-academy Trust)

Special Schools

Laura Gillespie, Governor (Bents Green)
Sacha Schofield, Head (Bents Green)

PRU

Alan Richards (Sheffield Inclusion Centre)

Apologies: Nigel Brooke-Smith, Jim Dugmore, Andrew Jones, Stacy McKay, Rod Padley (Lisa Smith attended on behalf of), Alison Warner.

Also in attendance: Cllr Dunn, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills; Amanda Murray, Strategy and Commissioning (notes); Mark Sheikh, Head of Service, Strategy and Commissioning.

Presenters: Jacky Beatson, Resourcing Coordinator; Stephen Bull, Deputy Strategic Insurance Manager; Candi Lawson, Strategic Commissioning Manager; Dominic Sleath, Head of Business Strategy – Information Systems and Performance; Rose Ward, Head of SEN.

1. Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Introductions were made and apologies noted as above.

2. Previous meeting minutes/matters arising

Agreed as a true and accurate record. All matters arising are covered by the agenda. A Covid update was not included on this agenda, but comments were invited as part of AOB.

3. SEND Review

Rose Ward verbally updated the Forum on the progress to help set the scene for item 4:

- Previously (up to June) we were low on compliance, but we now have only four Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans over the 20-week statutory deadline.
- There is a rising demand, resulting in an increased number of assessments, especially for mainstream support.
- We continue to work on the Written Statement of Action and compliance of Annual Reviews to ensure increased oversight of delivery (Section F).
- Budgets are overspent.

4. SEND Top-up Funding Arrangements

Candi Lawson presented the paper and summarised as follows:

- It is proposed that we repurpose the use of the £1.5m transfer to support inclusion by increasing access to mainstream schools by supporting localities. The previously supported activities which were intended to help reduce exclusions and escalations to special schools will now be supported by the High Needs Block.
- The consultation to date show that 78% of responders are in agreement with this proposal.
- Section 2 of the paper sets out our goals in the three-year plan.
- We need to be able to support schools to meet needs and therefore change the way funding is distributed.
- Change needs to be incremental and may require consultation.
- We will test the costing of EHC Plans to better help understand funding required, and Locality F will be part of the trial from January 2022.

Forum discussion raised the following points:

- It was confirmed that Early Years children are not covered by the above proposals as this applies to statutory school-age children only, but we are also looking at Early Years; for example Best Start and Transition to School – Vicky Carr will be seeking involvement from Early Years representatives.
- Keith Crawshaw reiterated previous requests to understand how much funding is required to continue to support inclusion - ongoing work and one-off projects - previously supported by the £1.5m transfer. Mark confirmed that we have made a funding provision and will continue to review what is required and will bring an update to the February Forum.
- It was reported that Locality F is concerned regarding what they consider to be a lack of detail around the consultation proposals to allow adequate time for a decision. A request was made for a Sheffield City Council (SCC) officer to attend their Locality meeting, but this could not be fulfilled due to timescales and other meeting commitments.
- The costing will only apply to mainstream schools at the moment and it is anticipated that banded models will enable better financial predications. There is an appetite for costing with schools and parents.
- Forum members felt that we are lacking the bigger picture as well as the details around spending: how it's deployed and future needs – we need the bigger picture to review SEN processes so that they can become more efficient and effective. We also need to look at the impact on special schools as the flow from mainstream is not yet being stemmed. Is it due to increasing need or that we're not spending on the right things that we're not making progress?

The Forum:

- **Noted** the three-year plan and progress to date.
- **Agreed to the transfer of £1.5m to the High Needs Block**, but requested a further update be brought to the February Forum, as per the above discussion. It was clarified that whilst Candi is happy to discuss any queries this further with colleagues after Christmas, that the proposal needs to be approved at this meeting in order to prepare final individual school budgets before the February Forum.

Action: Candi to provide a more detailed update for the February Forum.

5. DSG Overview – Principles and Approach

Mark Sheikh summarised the presentation as follows:

- The 2022/23 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation is: awaiting final confirmation, prior to the Chancellor's Autumn budget and based on the October 2020 Census.
- The table on slide 3 shows the variance compared to 2021/22 – an overall increase of £17.7m. Some of the figures are estimated based on 2021/22.
- Regarding Early Years:
 - An announcement has recently been made and this information will be reviewed by the Early Years Working Group and an update given to the February Forum.
 - The increase in rate is detailed on slide 5.
 - The increase to the sector does not cover their increased costs.
 - Cllr Dunn had now written to the Secretary of State twice about this matter recently (the response to the latest letter is still outstanding).
- Demand for High Needs continues to outstrip places. Details of the pressure on funding is shown on slide 6.
- Central Services Schools Block - we are awaiting a decision as to whether the Council can continue to cover reductions in historical commitments via a cash allocation, but it is the expectation that this will be agreed.
- Schools Block:
 - There is a £10.3m cash increase in 2022/23.
 - The Funding Group's proposals for how this should be allocated are included on slide 9 and are based on the principles of:
 - maintaining the National Funding Formula (NFF) ratio between primary and secondary of 1:1.29;
 - maintaining stability in primaries (our 2022/23 model shows that we are investing £8.6m more in primaries than the NFF suggests);
 - investing in Social Deprivation as a local priority as well as in line with the NFF; and
 - increasing the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to ensure that all schools receive at least a 2% increase.
- Schools are asked to note the Rates Policy changes for 2022/23 as per slide 11.

Karen Simpkin:

- Expressed confusion as to why we are saying the February Forum will consider Early Years proposals, but she isn't aware of a Working Group meeting until March and requested a list of who the proposals have been discussed with. Mark confirmed that further to the recent Government announcement, a meeting

has already been arranged with the Working Group on 21 January to discuss this in more detail.

- Feels there is a lack of confidence in the LA, that she hasn't been involved in discussions and requested a meeting before the scheduled Working Group meeting in January.

Action: The Chair suggested that Karen put her specific requests in writing so that officers can address them outside of the meeting.

Additional Forum comments and responses are summarised as follows:

- Regarding the capital costing of the High Needs Block places as per slide 6 – so far, we have £2m towards a £30m requirement. We have written to the Secretary of State. SCC will be contributing £1.5m and work is in progress to maximise resources. The Chancellor has announced an investment into capital which is subject to confirmation, and we hope will equate to approximately £26m for Sheffield. The top-up will have to remain static unless we receive additional funding.
- Further to the letters written to the Secretary of State, Cllr Dunn will continue to pursue the matter and will liaise with the communications team to draw further attention to these issues.
- We do not have any further information on the Chancellor's announcement of funding increase in real terms., but we will update the Forum when this has been clarified.

6. School Budget Modelling and National Funding Formula

Jacky Beatson talked the Forum through the budget models:

- The principles agreed by the Working Group, as mentioned above, are set out in Paper 5.
- All three models support schools with higher levels of social deprivation, but Model 3 is the recommended model; as by having an MFG of 2% it still provides an increase for schools with high and moderate levels of social deprivation, but it also provides a more significant increase for small schools with low levels of deprivation.
- The models and individual budget shares are illustrated in the appendices and the impact is explained further in section 3 of the paper.

The Chair thanked the Funding Working Group and Jacky for their work and **Forum members agreed** to the implementation of Model 3 for producing school budgets for 2022/23.

7. School Balances Update

Mark Sheikh gave a progress report as per Paper 6 – key points included:

- Further work is required to analyse the responses.
- There are still some schools with substantial balances - over and above the permitted 5% for secondary and 8% for primary.
- We also now have details of academy balances and again, these require further analysis – academies need to hold larger reserves to manage expectation around future need.

Comments from the Forum can be summarised as follows:

- Academies have to prove they are going concerns which can be a challenge as they are not provided with information around what level of reserve is appropriate and would need certainty before spending reserves. They need to work with the Department for Education (DfE) to understand this better.
- Any surplus should be used for children in the system now, not for future use.

The Chair used his school (Bradway Primary) as a case study:

- They have a fairly large carry forward which has accumulated quite quickly.
- This is partly due to Covid and partly due to having a younger workforce.
- They have large infrastructure projects planned to spend these reserves (as the capital grant is inadequate), but there have been delays with materials etc.
- Therefore, the expenditure of these reserves will not be incurred until 2022.

The Forum noted the update and agreed that further work should be undertaken by the Funding Working Group to analyse responses and understand planned use of reserves by schools.

Action: Mark to report back the outcome of this analysis to the February Forum.

8. Schools Insurance

Stephen Bull's Paper 7 reminds the Forum of the options for insurance, as previously presented, and requests a decision on behalf of maintained schools.

The Chair had sought opinion from colleagues and responses were in favour of the Zurich Municipal option.

Maintained school members (including the PRU and special schools) voted in favour of the Zurich Municipal option.

9. Broadband Contract Update

Further to the paper presented to the September Forum, Dominic Sleath gave an update as requested:

- The contract has now been extended to May 2024, with schools having the option not to renew beyond May 2022.
- Good progress is being made with sign up - over 80 schools have now signed up and we're contacting those who haven't.

The Forum noted the above update.

10. School Information Management System (SIMS) update

Further to the paper presented to the September Forum, Dominic Sleath gave an update as requested:

- SIMS and the company that maintains it, Education Software Services (ESS) has been sold.
- There were previously a number of contract options and we were recommending a possible one-year extension, but since then ESS have made a decision to

change the way they contract with schools – they plan to contract with schools directly for three years.

- This change will require scrutiny.
- Details of the change and options are outlined in the paper – sections 2 and 3.
- We have written to schools to explain the offer.
- If schools want to sign up, they need to inform SCC.

David Dennis added that academies have been through the experience of considering MIS systems and could share their experiences.

Action: Forum members to share details of their experience with Dominic by emailing dominic.sleath@sheffield.gov.uk and this information to then be shared via localities.

11. AOB

School Improvement Grant

Mark Sheikh informed the Forum of the DfE's consultation around the School Improvement Brokering Grant. A 50% reduction is being considered by the DfE and subject to the outcome of the consultation, we might need to agree de-delegation arrangements at the February Forum.

Early Years Working Group

Karen Simpkin reiterated her request for the invitation to be sent out for the Early Years Working Group, however other members of that group confirmed that they had already received the invitation for the meeting in January.

Cllr Dunn confirmed that we would ensure any increase in rate was passed on to providers.

Chair/Vice-chair arrangements

Paul Stockley confirmed that no-one had put themselves forward for these roles and that he was willing to continue in the interim until a replacement Chair was found. Members were encouraged to discuss what the role involves with Paul.

David Dennis and Keith Crawshaw have agreed to continue for a further term as Vice-chairs.

Date of next meeting: 21 February 2022, 3.00-5.00pm, venue TBC/Online